

SERMONS
ON DIFFERENT OCCASIONS,
AND ON
PRACTICAL DUTIES.

4460.9 7



SERMONS
ON
DIFFERENT OCCASIONS,
AND ON
PRACTICAL DUTIES.

BY
The Rev. Samuel Hayes, A. M.
Formerly Usher of Westminster School.

London:
Printed by G. Auld, Greville-Street, Hatton-Garden,
FOR T. CADELL, JUNIOR, AND W. DAVIES,
(SUCCESSORS TO MR. CADELL) IN THE STRAND.

1797.

SHIMONS



BRITISH MUSEUM

II

London, School of Mining

London:

FOR W. CARRUTHERS, LONDON, AND W. DAVIES,
(PRINTED BY THE STANDARD)

1887

L I S T
OF
SUBSCRIBERS.

A

The Honourable Charles Agar
William Pitt Amherst, Esq. 2 copies

B

Henry Boulton, Esq. 2 copies
Charles Berners, Esq. 2 copies
Charles Berners, junior, Esq. 2 copies
The Rev. H. D. Berners
Right Hon. Lord Edward Bentinck 2 copies
Mr. Jacob Bruce
William Barnett, Esq. 2 copies

Mr.

Mr. Barnes, Student of Christ Church, Oxford

Mr. Butt, Student of Christ Church

Isaac Hawkins Browne, Esq. 2 copies

C

The Rev. Wm. Crawford 2 copies

C. Clapham, Esq.

The Rev. T. Clapham 2 copies

Viscount Clifden

The Honourable and Right Reverend the Bishop
of Carlisle 10 copies

John Calland, Esq.

Robert Chester, Esq. 2 copies

Harry Chester, Esq.

Miss Clough

Rev. Dr. Cowper, Preb. of Durham 2 copies

Mr. Carey

Mr. Corne, Student of Christ Church

Mr. Courtenay, Student of Christ Church

D

The Rev. P. Debary 2 copies

Mr. Dickinson 2 copies

Mr.

LIST OF SUBSCRIBERS.

3

Mr. W. Dickinson 2 copies

Henry Dickens, Esq.

John English Dolben, Esq.

The Rev. Mr. Dod 3 copies

The Rev. the Dean of Christ Church

F

The Rev. Mr. Ferrars

G

The Rev. Dr. Goodenough

Mrs. Ginger

H

Henry Hinchcliffe, Esq. 2 copies

Mr. Robert Harper

John Hodges, Esq.

N. Hodges, Esq.

The Rev. Mr. Holmes 2 copies

Charles Hoare, Esq. 10 copies

Merrick Hoare, Esq. 6 copies

James Hume, Esq.

Mr. Horne, Student of Christ Church, Oxford

The Rev. R. Hall, Student of Christ Church

LIST OF SUBSCRIBERS.

J

H. N. Jarrett, Esq.
 Rev. John Jefferys, Rector of Barnes 2 copies
 The Rev. Dr. Jefferys, Refidentary Canon of
 St. Paul's 2 copies

K

Hinton Kelly, Esq.
 Mr. Kydd, Student of Chrif Church
 John Lifter Kaye, Esq. 10 copies
 Lieutenant-Colonel Kaye 4 copies

L

Matthew Lewis, Esq.
 Mr. Levet, Student of Chrif Church

M

Mr. Meadows
 Lady Meadows
 Earl Mexborough
 W. Marfden, Esq. 2 copies
 Right Hon. Lady Mendip
 The

LIST OF SUBSCRIBERS.

5

The Rev. Robert Markham, Archdeacon of York

6 copies

Osborne Markham, Esq. 2 copies

William Markham, Esq. 4 copies

N

The Rev. Edward Nares

P

The Rev. T. D. Plettow

Mr. W. Perry

Lord Paget 10 copies

The Rev. Thos. Pettingal 2 copies

Mr. Page, Student of Christ Church

Mr. Phillimore, Student of Christ Church

The Rev. Mr. Pelt, Student of Christ Church

R

Mr. Roe, Student of Christ Church

S

The Rev. Edward Smedley 2 copies

The Hon. Henry Savile

The

The Hon. Charles Savile
 C. Simpson, Esq. 2 copies
 John Smyth, Esq. M. P.
 Mr. Spencer Stanhope 2 copies
 Rev. John Smith, Westm. School 2 copies
 The Rev. Dr. Smith, Prebend of Westminster
 Mr. Slade, Student of Christ Church

T

Geo. Templar, Esq. 2 copies
 John Thompson, Esq.
 Richard Townley, Esq.
 Wm. Elias Taunton, A. M. Student of Christ-
 Church, Oxford

V

Lady Anne Vernon 2 copies
 The Rev. Th. Vialls
 The Rev. Dr. Vincent 4 copies
 The Rev. Ch. Vincent, Trinity College, Oxford

Mrs.

LIST OF SUBSCRIBERS.

7

W

His Grace William Lord Archbishop of York

20 copies

Mrs. Walker

Dr. Warren

Mr. Henry Warren

Mr. Frederic Warren

Mr. Edward Warren

Daniel Webb, Esq. 2 copies

The Rev. Mr. Warburton, Lambeth

Rev. D. Waddilove, Dean of Rippon 2 copies

The Rev. Mr. Wingfield 4 copies

The Rev. Mr. Warde

C. W. Wynne, Esq. Student of Christ Church,

Oxford 2 copies

Y

Joseph Yates, Esq. 2 copies

The Rev. G. ANDREWS, and the Rev.
E. SMEDLEY, beg leave to inform the Sub-
scribers to this Volume of Sermons, that
they do not hold themselves responsible for
any part of the Contents, the greatest part
of the Volume having been printed before
they were concerned in it.

SERMON I.

HEBREWS, chap. xi. ver. 1.

*Faith is the substance of things hoped for ; the
evidence of things not seen.*

THE Apostle, in order to confirm the Christians of Judæa in their new religion, in the preceding chapters shewed them, that the Jewish tabernacle and temple, with the services performed therein, had been figurative of Christ, his sufferings, and religion. He also proved the insufficiency of the legal sacrifices for the complete atonement of sin ; and that the redemption of mankind was alone accomplished by the death of Jesus Christ. In the chapter which commences with the words of the text, he enumerates the various instances of the

power of faith recorded in the Old Testament. He shews them, that the patriarchs and holy men mentioned in scripture, were animated by confidence in the revelation of God, and therefore willing to suffer temporal inconveniences, in the hope of future and invisible rewards. So likewise they, believing the truth of Christianity, and looking forward to the accomplishment of the promises of the gospel, ought patiently to endure the evils of persecution, and not apostatize from the principles which they had adopted, either at the solicitation of interest or the dread of danger.

The word *faith* is used in a variety of senses; which must be ascertained by a reference to the drift and tendency of those passages where it occurs. But the most sublime and important meaning of the word, is that in the text; that it is "the substance, the assurance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen." The faith of Abraham was, that he looked for a city which hath foundations, even the heavenly Jerusalem,

Jerusalem, spoken of in the prophecies, whose Builder and Maker is God. The faith of the other patriarchs was, that confessing themselves strangers and pilgrims on the earth, they declared plainly that they sought a better country; that is, an heavenly. The faith of Moses was, that he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; for he had respect unto the recompense of reward, and endured, as seeing Him who is invisible. The faith of the Martyrs was, that they chose to be tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

Such is the account given by St. Paul; not in abstruse and refined, but in plain and intelligible terms. The ingenuity of man has, indeed, at different times, superadded much upon this subject; and superstition and enthusiasm have frequently ran into many wild extremes concerning the operations of faith; arguing rather from the chimerical dreams of fancy and an heated imagination,

gination, than the sober decisions of reason, and the uncorrupted word of God. To counteract the pernicious effects of such mistaken notions, we have nothing to do but to revert to the doctrine as delivered in the evangelical writings, and regulate our opinions by what is propounded in them. I will, therefore, in the following Discourse, enquire what faith in God is; and what faith is in Jesus Christ; and what, in consequence of this doctrine, is required of us.

However uncultivated and barbarous men have been in the various regions of the earth, we read of no one nation entirely destitute of all belief in the existence of a Superior Being. Adoration, indeed, has, in many places, been transferred from the invisible Creator to his visible works. The Sun, for instance, has been the object of divine worship: that, appearing to be the benignant source from whence light and heat were shed over the face of the whole world, was looked upon as worthy of veneration and homage, on account of the great
 blessings

blessings which originated from it. Men, in general, were conscious that they enjoyed a variety of good; they knew also that this was not ascribable solely unto their own exertions; that the sun did not shine at their command; that the earth was not crowned with riches and abundance merely through the efforts of human art or industry; and that the tumultuous waves of the sea were not confined within certain limits by their authority. Common sense likewise informed them, that the operations of nature, so manifold and wonderful, yet at the same time so regular, and so well adapted to answer particular purposes, could never be the result of chance and accident: nor could they believe that the casual concurrence of the particles of matter, which always appears incapable of intelligence, was able to produce such a system as creation exhibits. They could not, therefore, account for what they saw, and what they, from day to day, enjoyed, except by admitting the existence of an Almighty, though invisible Being, who created, and who superintends all things.

As to the introduction of many gods in the religion of a great part of the heathen world, they seem to be nothing more than representatives of the different attributes of the Supreme Being; and are all described as subordinate to his controuling power.

Such are the reasons which seem the most obvious and primary motives to the acknowledgment of a God independent, almighty, and eternal; for, unless we conclude that his existence is from all eternity, we must be reduced to the necessity of believing, that He who gave being to all other things, had a beginning himself; which supposition is manifestly absurd, and exposed to insurmountable difficulties. Faith then, in this article, is the belief that God is; that he originally created, and still continues to govern the works of his hands. This is the foundation of all religion: and so clear and evident is this great truth, that very few, if any, deny it: and almost every one would think his understanding impeached, should it be alleged that he did disbelieve it. Yet,
if

if we look into the world, and consider the various pursuits of men ; if we examine the motives to which the principal part of their actions must be referred, we shall have little reason to believe that mortals are sincerely influenced by this persuasion, that they are ever subject to the power of Omnipotence. The apostle says, "he that cometh to God, must believe that he is ; and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." To acknowledge ~~that~~ ^{that} mighty, is ~~a~~ ^{superficial} and inanimate degree of piety, if we suppose that his power is directed to no adequate ends. And if we conceive, that although the eyes of the Lord are over all his works, he is indifferent to the interests of virtue ; that he will never reward the faithful services of the righteous, nor punish the obdurate depravity of the wicked, we surely entertain ideas utterly unworthy of a Being possessed of knowledge and goodness in the most unlimited extent. Faith, then, in God, should be a * serious,

* Clarke, vol. 1. Sermon. I.

practical, affecting impression, and deep sense upon the mind, of a Supreme Being, who created the world by his power, preserves and governs it by his goodness and wisdom, and will judge it with justice, mercy, and truth; of such a Supreme Being, whose glory no eye can behold; whose majesty no thought can comprehend; whose power no strength can resist; from whose presence no swiftness can flee; from whose knowledge no secret can be concealed; whose justice no art can evade, and whose goodness every creature partakes of. Such is that faith, without which no one can come to God; that is, can be admitted to the participation of those treasures which the Deity has promised to the faithful.

The second thing proposed to your attention, is what constitutes faith in Jesus Christ.

The Scripture informs us, that man was originally created for the enjoyment of happiness; but that, by disobedience to the command of his Creator, he entailed upon
all

all his descendants sin, misery, and death. When this sentence was denounced upon the human race, God was pleased to alleviate the terrors of it, by foretelling the future victory of man over the enemy that had seduced him from his duty. At different periods this event was more clearly pointed out. The Person was fully described who should accomplish this great work; who should rescue us from the power of death, and reinstate us in our forfeited inheritance. His character was accurately drawn, and his sufferings enumerated, by which expiation would be made for original sin. In the fulness of time, at the juncture marked out by preceding prophecies, Jesus Christ appeared upon earth. And though the Jews did reject him, perverting the oracles of God, and substituting, earthly instead of the spiritual triumphs which were to distinguish the Messiah, yet that they did at that period anxiously expect a Deliverer, is a truth that precludes all doubt. This sacred Person is declared to be the Son of God. He established the divinity of his mission, not by
the

the influence of wealth, or the arm of secular power, but by signs and wonders; by healing the sick, giving eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, and calling the dead from the grave. These were the gracious works in which he was employed during his residence among men. His discourse also was with authority; for he spake, according to the testimony, even of his enemies, as man never spake. His words were not those of earthly wisdom, such as from their depth might strike the learned hearer with admiration, or by their subtle ingenuity beguile and confound the ignorant. He instructed the uninformed in the plainest manner, baffled the attacks of malice, and overthrew the artful questions of his opponents, not by laboured arguments, but by the invincible words of truth. A system of moral duties was delivered by him, divested of all intricacy; not framed merely to suit the political institutions of one particular age or nation, but calculated for all times and regions, and pure beyond any thing the world had ever seen before. In the last place,
light

light was thrown upon a subject, important indeed, but hitherto envelopped in doubt and obscurity. Some few among the Heathens, by the deductions of natural reason, had entertained ideas of a future state, and embraced the belief of it, from a conviction that it was the only sure refuge against the manifold evils of this life. As to the Jews, the blessings which God had promised them under the Mosaical dispensation, were principally temporal; riches, empire, and freedom. It remained, therefore, for Christ to dispel this darkness; to demonstrate the certainty of a future state, and by displaying the awful consequences of it, to animate men to the faithful performance of those duties which might ensure everlasting happiness hereafter. Such was the tendency of our Saviour's actions and doctrines. After a life thus passed in uniform beneficence, he offered himself a sacrifice and atonement for the sins of the whole world. Afterwards he rose again for our justification, and finally ascended into Heaven, where he sits at the right hand of God, the Mediator between

between divine justice and human imperfection. After this brief account, and it is no other than what the Scripture expressly warrants, little doubt can be made what constitutes faith in Christ. It is a sincere belief of all these articles, accompanied with fervent zeal to do all that is required in consequence of it. It must be confessed, notwithstanding what some enthusiasts have urged, that faith, being "the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen," is not so strong as that of sense. And herein principally consists the intrinsic merit of Christians. Were the glorious rewards which religion hath annexed to the practice of righteousness as clearly propounded to our view, as those are which the world can bestow, we should be overcome by an irresistible impulse; we should no longer be in a state of trial, and of course no longer entitled to any recompense. When men, in the prosecution of wealth, forsake the paths of integrity, they are actuated by the desire of possessing that which they think will contribute to their welfare,

welfare, for they know what services riches can perform, and they daily see the effects of them. Was the case equally clear in the other respect ; were the treasures of Heaven equally objects of our senses, and their advantages as obvious, who would sin against God, while he knows that his disobedience must entail upon him the loss of them ? But is the evidence of religion therefore weak, because it is the evidence of things not seen ? Certainly not ; there is still sufficient to command our assent, and determine our practice. If we are sensible of the importance of temporal good, because its effects are visible, we cannot at the same time but be conscious, that its acquisition is uncertain ; that the best laid plans are frequently disconcerted, and that, after all, the duration of it, at the utmost extent that hope can suggest, lasts only for a few years. Oppose this to the promises of the Gospel ! You must then compare uncertainty with certainty, infinite with finite, eternal with momentary duration. The mere probability of a future state, which involves in it consequences

sequences of such awful moment, is surely enough to arrest our consideration, to hinder us from detaching our thoughts from it at the call of fugitive pleasures, or the allurements of unsubstantial riches. And truly wise is he who foregoes a present advantage; by the enjoyment of which he may renounce eternal happiness. But let us remember that faith is not a barren virtue; does not consist in verbal declaration of belief. Scarcely any person, if the question were put to him, would say that he did not believe in the existence of a God. Yet how poor, how weak is this simple profession, unless the efficacy of it appear in virtuous actions, actions such as dependence and gratitude should produce. Faith in Christ, is an expression of which we have heard much; but it is to be feared that it has often been the ostentatious boast of nominal Christians, without being attended by the essential requisites; inward piety, and holiness of life. Many persons, seduced by the artful reasoning of others, and terrified by the violent denunciations of their teachers,

or

or yielding to the influence of enthusiasm, have fancied that the merits of their Saviour were sufficient to secure their salvation without any exertions of their own. And some, supposing themselves in the number of the elect, have concluded that their future happiness was certain beyond a possibility of failure. But is not this to substitute a mode of acceptance very different from that which the Gospel recommends? God indeed sends down rain upon the earth, and causes the sun to animate the face of nature; yet, without the efforts of industry, the husbandman would in vain expect the riches of the harvest. Our beneficent Creator also, in compassion to the infirmities of mankind, vouchsafed to send us his only Son, that he might be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Through him we have access to the Father; and by his stripes we are healed. Yet there is nothing in Scripture to warrant such an interpretation of the effects of our Redeemer's sufferings as superstition has conceived. We are commanded to work out our salvation with
fear

fear and trembling; with fear, lest the pleasures of iniquity alienate our hearts from the duties upon which eternal life is suspended. "Not every one," our Saviour affirms, "that faith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven." What that will is, the word of God hath clearly demonstrated. To this knowledge, therefore, let us add the practice of those virtues which the Christian religion proposes! Faith which terminates in mere speculation, whatever grand qualities the weakness or credulity of men may assign to it, is utterly inadequate to our salvation; "for as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." And though it be "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," yet it ought to be sufficiently strong to animate our minds, and raise us above the fleeting and unsubstantial enjoyments of the world. For the reward annexed to it cannot but be an object of the highest importance to true wisdom.

It

(17)

It is the reward which Almighty Power will bestow, and which Infinite Goodness hath reserved for those who faithfully fulfil the terms of acceptance.

c

SERMON

1811
The first of the year was a
very dry one, and the
ground was very hard.

22X33

X SERMON II.

2 COR. chap. vii. ver. 10.

*Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation,
not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the
world worketh death.*

SAINT Paul had, with great labour and unremitted assiduity in the evangelical ministry, established a Christian church at Corinth. But after the apostle had been absent two or three years, great disorders prevailed among his new converts, to the disgrace of Christianity in general, and of the sacred character of the zealous apostle in particular. Corinth, we are informed by history, was one of the most opulent and populous cities of Greece, and, from its situ-

ation between two seas, drew together a very considerable trade from all parts. The consequence of this influx of wealth was, as is generally the case, pride, effeminacy, and luxury. Lasciviousness had attained such prevalence among this corrupted people, that it was not only tolerated, but even consecrated, by the public worship of impure deities. Several of the Gentile converts, subsequent to St. Paul's preaching among them, commenced teachers. They blended the loose doctrines of pagan superstition with the chaste simplicity of the Gospel; and, decorating this incongruous mass with the specious flowers of oratory, they drew over a part of the people to the adoption of their tenets. The Jewish profelytes, on the other hand, formed a faction against the apostle, because they thought it a degradation of their character, and a diminution of their national importance, that the Gentile converts should be made equal to themselves. St. Paul, therefore, eager to vindicate his own doctrines, and to clear the Gospel from the erroneous principles

principles of these two parties, wrote his first Epistle. In the second he refers to the success of it. Many, who were convinced by his arguments, renounced their errors, and returned to that rule of faith which he had recommended. It is to this he alludes in the words of the text: " Now I rejoice," he says, " not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance; for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing: for godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death."

These words naturally divide my present Discourse into two parts, for they obviously propose two things to our consideration; namely, the godly sorrow that worketh repentance, not to be repented of, because it leads to salvation; and the sorrow of the world, which is to be avoided, because it leads to death.

Did our lives glide in one uniform and unruffled current of prosperity, did every hope terminate in fruition, and was every pursuit after every earthly good crowned with the satisfaction of complete success, what would be the consequence? If men, notwithstanding the daily and indisputable evidence of the precariousness of temporal possessions, seem, by their incessant assiduity of pursuit to look upon them as fixed and permanent, this opinion would undoubtedly be much strengthened, were there very few disappointments visible in human affairs; and were there none met with, we should certainly lose all sense of futurity: our whole thoughts would converge to the present scene, and all our labours tend solely to the acquisition of this perfect happiness. If indeed we were placed here in a state of everlasting existence, or if nothing remained beyond this life, such an arrangement might be proper. In the first place, it would be highly derogatory to the attribute of Infinite Goodness to have given us an eternal residence upon earth, and yet to cloud

cloud that existence with the gloom of future and never-ending evil: to give us immortality, subjected to the mortifications of disappointment, and a prey to toil, without the certainty of securing real advantage. And if the present were destined by fate to be the whole of our being, who could suppose life to be imparted by a God infinite in power and mercy? We should then be truly miserable.—Knowing that our days here are but few, we might anxiously look toward death, when under the pressure of irretrievable misery, and consider it as a refuge from the storms of the world. But this would be a poor consolation. It would be but gloomy comfort at best, to reflect that the calamities we now suffer, calamities perhaps not brought upon us by our own misconduct, but wholly ascribeable to the iniquity of others, can alone be terminated by the utter extinction of our life and being. And if there be any thing upon earth pleasing to us; any delights in the possession of which the mind feels its wishes gratified, how dreadful must the idea of separation be from

these comforts! to have so much to lose, and nothing to substitute in the room of the loss, except the annihilation of all sense and consciousness. But God, whose works are the effects of unerring wisdom, directed by infinite goodness, hath created us to answer very different ends. He hath given us a life of short continuance, but full of trouble, and subject to the unavoidable doom of death. Yet this trouble is alleviated, and the terrors of this doom are mitigated by the prospect which he sets before us, and the glorious rewards which he promises to all those who faithfully perform the duties propounded by his holy word. He hath vouchsafed to inform those upon whom he showers down the riches of temporal blessings, what he requires in return for these voluntary gifts of his goodness; namely, love and gratitude towards the gracious Author of them, and charity and benevolence towards man. If, on the contrary, it be his pleasure to abridge us of the enjoyments of this life, to expose us to the pains of sickness, and the accumulated miseries of distress and poverty,

poverty, we are to submit to them patiently, from the conviction that they are the salutary corrections of an all-merciful Parent; that they are the dispensations of a Supreme Being; of him who is not warped by prejudice, or influenced by the narrow bigotry of partiality; of him who will not always "forget the poor, nor suffer the patient abiding of the meek to perish for ever."

Now, the evils of life may be comprized under these two heads. They are either such as befall us from the iniquity and depravity of others, or from our own folly and misconduct. It has been a point of great difficulty to many to clear up, why God, to whom virtue and piety cannot but be agreeable, should often suffer the just and righteous to groan under the burthen of calamity, and, though possessed of almighty power, not to interpose in their behalf. There may be many reasons for this, which the scantiness of our intellectual faculties cannot at present conceive; and as we are
unable

unable to comprehend the whole arrangement of divine Providence, we have little authority to question the disposition of any particular part. He who placed us here in a state of probation preparatory to that of judgment, and who hath promised to reward those that perform their duty faithfully with no less a compensation than eternal glory, he surely has a right to try our faith, and the firmness of our attachment, by any methods that seem proper to that wisdom which cannot err. Though a man be just and upright in his dealings, though he be at present impressed with a devout sense of his duty to God, he cannot tell what fatal effects a continued and uniform course of prosperity might produce. Many who had signalized themselves by virtuous principles, have been lulled by the opiates of ease and happiness into a forgetfulness of all the duties which they owed to men, as being their brethren, and to God, as being their Creator. Who can be certain that a similar train of prosperous circumstances would
not

not operate in the same manner upon himself? Who can be sure that his fidelity is so strongly established, as to be proof against those attacks under which others have repeatedly sunk? He that justly considers the power of temptation, and the inherent and natural weakness of man, will be far from entertaining such arrogant ideas of his own fortitude. Conscious of his infirmities, he will be led to bless the hand that corrects him, to look upon chastisement as the award of mercy, because it has probably saved him from hardness of heart, and contempt of God's holy will and commandments. But though we thus suffer by the wickedness of others, and the miseries we endure cannot be imputed in the least respect to ourselves, are we therefore to think that we are punished undeservedly? Can we, after a strict and impartial review of our actions, pronounce ourselves entirely free from the stains of sin? Alas! the very best of us have no reason to make an ostentatious boast of our virtues, but rather to exclaim in the humility of contrition, God

be

be merciful unto us finners. Let our sufferings, then, lead us to repent of those sins we have committed : and if we are tempted to murmur at the dispensations of Providence, from a conviction of our integrity, let us consider, that we do not suffer more than many of the righteous have endured ; and that even he who vouchsafed to redeem the world, was “ a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.”

But if our calamities are avowedly the miserable consequences of our own guilt, if we can trace their source to our own immorality and wickedness, our complaints, in this case, are wholly unjustifiable, nay, they are even criminal ; for they are an aggravation of the iniquity that we have perpetrated. He that knows he has offended God, and at the same time finds punishment entailed upon the offence, has only one line of conduct to adopt ; to feel compunction for his crimes, and to obviate the further effects of divine indignation, by contrition and amendment. He ought to be

be penetrated with godly sorrow, that sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation *. “ If they be bound in fetters,” says Elihu, in the book of Job, “ and be
 “ holden in cords of affliction, then he
 “ sheweth them their work and their
 “ transgressions that they have exceeded;
 “ he openeth also their ear to discipline,
 “ and commandeth that they return from
 “ iniquity.” The end then of that chastisement which God inflicts upon sinners in this world, is to reclaim them from the evil of their ways, † “ to withdraw man
 “ from his purpose, and hide pride from
 “ man;” to renew a right spirit within him, and, by temporal misery, enable him to escape the condemnation of eternal torments. When every thing succeeds to our wish, and we revel in the undisturbed gratification of all we desire, when the morning dawns with the prospect of new delights, and the evening closes with the festivity of new pleasures, we are apt to forget that,

* Job xxxvi. 8. † Job xxxiii. 17.

“ for all these things, God will call us into judgment.” Our hearts become hardened against the cries of the poor, and dead to the importunities of the destitute. Intoxicated by the present, we disregard the future. All the dictates of religion are either silenced by the clamours of licentious mirth, or superseded by the eager pursuit of fresh objects of enjoyment. But when this luxurious scene is changed, when the gloom of adversity surrounds us, we are led to meditate upon the fallacy of earthly joys, and the uncertainty of human possessions; when the judgments of God fall upon us, then we learn righteousness. The stagnant pool appears tranquil, and presents to us no idea of terror; yet we know that, from its stagnation, the waters imbibe putrefaction, and of course become pernicious. So the life which passes in a perpetual calm, which is never ruffled by the salutary storms of affliction, stagnates in sloth and inactivity, and becomes incapable of fulfilling those duties for which it was given. The man who hath gained an elevated post by the
the

the insidious arts of fraud, or by the bold exertions of open injustice, if he meets with no disturbance in his ill-gotten dignity, may be easily led to forget the means by which he acquired it, in the enjoyment of the pleasure which his pride receives from it: consequently, he may live without making any restitution to those whom he hath injured, and die without that repentance which can alone obliterate the heinousness of his guilt. But if this same person meets with disquietude in his possession; if he finds contempt his portion, instead of honour; and vexation and distraction the fruits of his dishonesty, instead of peace and tranquillity, he must be obdurate indeed, if he can reflect that he has sacrificed his integrity for an unsubstantial good, and not be alarmed at the consequences which his iniquity may draw upon him hereafter. Let all those who thus suffer here for the crimes they commit, remember, that although their sufferings in this state cannot but be short, there remains another tribunal before which they must appear, and by the decisions of which

which they will be happy or miserable to all eternity. That they have been wretched here will avail them nothing, unless their anguish of mind shall have worked in them a devout sense of their transgressions, and terminated in a retreat from the evil of their ways. Godly sorrow indeed worketh repentance to salvation, but the sorrow of the world worketh death; and it now remains that we consider what this is.

Any one who is disappointed in a favourite project; who misses that honour which he imagined would sooth his pride; or fails in the attainment of those riches which he fancied would satiate all his desires, naturally experiences the mortification of defeat; the proud man feels the supports of pride withdrawn from his grasp, and the voluptuous man finds himself cut off from those delights upon which he had founded all his expectations of earthly comfort. And he who shall be so far fortunate as to gain what he prosecutes; he who hath elevated himself by unmanly intrigue, or avowed injustice,

injustice, yet finds himself mortified in his elevation, and meets with contemptuous insult where he expected implicit obedience, such a one will undoubtedly lament the insufficiency of his honourable acquisitions. He also who, after having obtained wealth by the activity of unwearied diligence, without any regard to the sensations of humanity, or the statutes of religion, is convinced by experience, that what he has acquired is inadequate to the completion of happiness; that opulence is harassed by suspicion, and possession embittered with the thoughts of insecurity; who is tortured to think that what he hath lost to-day, may be followed by a still greater diminution of his wealth to-morrow; he likewise is a prey to sorrow and care. But if these men know no anguish except what arises from the frustration of their hopes, this sorrow is that of the world. They are disquieted indeed; but this is not the disquietude of religious contrition. They grieve not because they have violated the commands of God, but solely because their schemes are either thwarted, or they have

not been able to attain that bliss which they thought their plans would secure. That such sorrow worketh death, who can doubt? Death, in the words of the apostle, is opposed to salvation; that is, eternal misery to eternal happiness. The sorrow of the world, as it results only from the disappointment, or vanity, of earthly schemes, seeks no other remedy than the removal of present evil. Actuated wholly by the impulse of temporal good, the ambitious man endeavours to compensate one failure, by engaging in a new project, and carefully avoiding whatever seems to have been injurious to his interests before. The avaricious man is stimulated by one loss, to prosecute his mercenary schemes in another channel; and, as he is wiser by experience, his plans are laid with greater art and policy. Thus do the days, the irrevocable days of life, unprofitably glide away; and the scene at last closes, without any preparations made against the hour of death, or any endeavours to mitigate the dread of future judgment. “ Such is the way
“ which

" which seemeth right unto a man ; but
 " the end thereof are the ways of death."

Let us then consider, that we are under the inspection of a God, merciful indeed, but that Being to whom vengeance belongeth ! Let us remember, that " affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground ;" that life, though short, is a trust, the management of which is a matter of everlasting moment to every individual ! If we groan under the burthen of misery brought upon us by our own iniquity, the justice of our sufferings ought to stop the mouth of all complaint ; and as the evil we endure is the punishment of our sins, it is likewise a strong argument for repentance. But if we suffer by the crimes of others, by the arts of fraud, or the hand of violence, there is a refuge which can never fail those who faithfully trust in it, the protection of Him, from whom " all that travail and are heavy laden, may find rest unto their souls *."

* Wisdom, iii. 5, &c.

" The righteous," says the wise man, " hav-
 " ing been a little chastised, shall be greatly
 " rewarded; for God proved them, and
 " found them worthy for himself. As gold
 " in the furnace hath he tried them, and
 " received them as a burnt offering. And
 " in the time of their visitation they shall
 " shine: they shall judge the nations, and
 " have dominion over the people, and their
 " Lord shall reign for ever."

SERMON.

SERMON III.

ST. MATTHEW, chap. x. ver. 33.

*Whoſoever ſhall deny me before men, him will
I alſo deny before my Father who is in
Heaven.*

WHILE the wind blows a gentle gale,
and that too in the direction of
the propoſed courſe, as it requires little ſkill
or labour to navigate the veſſel, the pilot is
entitled to no conſiderable portion of praiſe
if the ſhip arrives ſafe at the deſtined port;
but when the tempeſt rages, and dangers
threaten, there is a neceſſity for particular
exertions; and at that perilous criſis, the
ſuperiority of art and fortitude appears con-
ſpicuous. In the ſame manner, while for-

tune co-operates with our wishes, and success crowns our endeavours, the friend who continues firm in his attachment, has but little claim to approbation. The reality of this virtue cannot be clearly manifested, unless the scene change. That man only, whose fidelity no outward circumstances can shake, who in the day of adversity exhibits the same disinterested zeal, and does not retreat from his duty in the hour of distress and danger, he alone is to be accounted faithful; and as he displays unquestionable proof of sincerity, he justly merits that praise which is due to this virtue. Nor is the matter different with regard to religion. Did no difficulties, no perils, cross the line of our duty, there would be little merit in adhering to it. To be patient when we feel no calamity to complain of, to be honest when prosperity secures us from temptations to injustice, to be resigned to the dispensations of Providence when it showers down temporal blessings upon us,—in all this surely there is no very eminent display of piety. But the Creator and Governor

vernor of the universe hath so arranged the affairs of this life, that an undisturbed course of happiness is seldom or never the lot of any mortal. And since the present is merely a state of trial, preparatory to that of rewards and punishments, it is ordered by the decrees of Eternal Wisdom, that men should be exposed to such conflicts and perils as may leave room for the operation of faith, and enable them to evince their constancy and reliance upon the promises of God.

When our blessed Saviour delegated his apostles, and commissioned them to go forth and teach all nations, he did not conceal from them the miseries to which the evangelical ministry would subject them. He told them that he sent them forth as sheep among wolves; that is, that their simplicity would be encountered by art, their humility by pride, their poverty by the wealth of infidels, and their weakness by the power of kings. To confirm their faith, and animate them to perseverance in

this perilous undertaking, he said, "Who-
 " ever shall confess me before men, him
 " will I confess also before my Father
 " who is in Heaven. But whosoever
 " shall deny me before men, him will I
 " also deny before my Father who is in
 " Heaven." As we are professors of the
 same religion, and consequently, by that
 profession, declare that our hopes of eter-
 nal happiness are built on the same founda-
 tion, and that immortal life can only be
 obtained by obedience to those laws which
 were prescribed to them, it is no less incum-
 bent upon us to consider the words of the
 text with the attention due to their awful
 importance.

With regard to the apostles, the danger
 lest they should deny their Lord and Master,
 arose from the peculiar difficulties of their
 situation. They were surrounded by ene-
 mies, equally powerful and willing to per-
 secute them with the utmost rigour. To
 take up the cross and follow Christ, was to
 renounce all the comforts and conveniences
 of

of this life, to embrace the most abject poverty, and encounter death in all the forms that ingenious malice could devise. Both Jew and Gentile opposed the progress of Christianity. The former, from a bigotted and inflexible attachment to their own rites and ceremonies, from the arrogant conceit that they, being the chosen people of God, were alone entitled to the privileges of Divine Favour. The latter, bred up in idolatry and voluptuousness, and slaves to the delusive maxims of vain philosophy, derided the simplicity of the gospel, and refused to relinquish the luxurious gratifications of sense for a religion which imposed the most severe restraints upon sensual pleasures. It surely then required an uncommon degree of fortitude and resolution, and an unshaken conviction of the divinity of our Saviour, and his ability to fulfil his promises, to stand firm in such severe and complicated trials of their faith. Yet this fortitude did the apostles, upon all occasions, uniformly display. They willingly became poor in this world, that they might be rich in the next.

next. Amidst the terrors of persecution, and the bitter severities of varied distress, they adhered to their principles. In the face of death, embittered by all the torments that malice could devise, they made no servile concessions to that Power which could rescue them from their miserable fate. They did not deny their Redeemer before men, lest he should deny them before his Father who is in Heaven.

Thanks be to God, we are delivered from these perilous conflicts. The adoption of Christianity does not expose us to imprisonment, stripes, and death; nor is our duty harrassed by those evils which the first teachers of our holy religion uniformly experienced. Nevertheless, dangers still threaten us, and difficulties are still to be encountered. The state of a Christian is, and ever will be, in this life, a state of warfare against the lusts of the flesh. And it is to be apprehended that numbers daily revolt from their duty, sacrifice the future to the present, abandon eternal for temporal good,
and

and deny their Lord before men, without properly reflecting that he will deny them before his Father who is in Heaven. To enumerate all the ways in which we may deny Christ, is impossible; they are as manifold as the disorders which arise from the indulgence of the depraved passions. I will therefore only mention a few, and, in the last place, lay before you the solemn consequences which are implied in the words of the text.

The ruling principle that animates the human breast, is the desire to procure ease, and avoid pain. That this active impulse is wisely placed within us, no doubt can be made; for Infinite Goodness cannot but have created us for the enjoyment of happiness: yet we could hardly believe the goodness of God to be infinite, if our existence were wholly confined to this world. That there is much misery in this life, is so evident, that it precludes the necessity of bringing arguments to prove it. The highest enjoyments here are imperfect; and if there be
labour

labour and toil in the prosecution of earthly good, many cares and distractions are the associates of possession. Let temporal felicity be ever so complete, and ever so secure against the contingencies of fortune, there is one thing which must contaminate its pleasing qualities, and diminish its apparent value; namely, that the tenure of it is uncertain, and extended to the utmost verge of probability, can last but for a few years. The end and design of religion is to animate us with brighter prospects, and to engage us in the pursuit of that good which claims pre-eminence in every respect that justly confers superiority. The word of God, meant to make us wise unto salvation opposes the happiness of heaven to that of earth; that is, perfect and incorruptible bliss to incomplete and transient good. Nor are we left ignorant of the means necessary to attain the former, though we are often prevented from applying to them, by the undue ascendancy which the latter acquires over the heart. Whenever we reflect seriously, we cannot but be convinced of the emptiness

emptiness of the treasures of this world, because we cannot but be conscious that the blessings they procure are fugitive; yet, as the gratifications to be enjoyed are immediate, the mind is overpowered by their influence; and all the consequences denounced by the words of unerring truth are obdurately disregarded. — The man who is placed in an opulent condition, feels himself possessed of whatever can minister to his licentious pleasures. If his riches do not procure for him real friends, they at least conciliate associates, who, while they feast at his cost, and revel by means of his liberality, are zealous, in return, to demonstrate their gratitude by soothing his passions, and joining in his intemperate schemes. Thus eager alone in those pursuits where sensuality expects to find new delights, he is deaf to all the claims of humanity. In vain do the distressed and indigent apply to him for redress. As the sensations of pity and compassion are strangers to his breast, so the refined, the exalted joys which attend the alleviation of misery and wretchedness,

wretchedness, have no charms for him. Negligent of the use to which religion directs the application of wealth, he never considers the dreadful punishment entailed upon the abuse of it, but consumes his days under the bondage of iniquity, and thinks himself secure, "till his soul is required of him," and summoned before the tribunal of his God. These were some of the forcible reasons, undoubtedly, that induced Agur, in his celebrated address to the Almighty, to pray against opulence; and intreat God that he would remove riches from him. "Give me not riches," says the pious petitioner, "lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?" Lest, elevated by worldly enjoyments, and intoxicated by the specious security of earthly bliss, I forget my dependence upon thee, and, unmindful from what source all my present comforts flow, renounce the performance of the duties which the gracious Author of them require, and thus render myself unworthy of that favour which can alone dispense additional blessings, undeserving of that protection which alone can be an effectual refuge against evil. A
rich

rich man of this stamp then denies God; and who can doubt that he likewise denies his Saviour? The whole time of our blessed Redeemer, while upon earth, was passed in the exertion of compassion towards the miseries of man. He went about daily doing good; healing the various infirmities of the body, speaking peace to the disquieted mind, and never exerted his divine power but for the purposes of beneficence. What was the tenor of his doctrine but an uniform confirmation of that which the angels announced at his birth: "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good-will towards men!" He finally left us his example for our imitation, and a guide to our steps in the paths of everlasting life. In the awful account which he gives of the decisions of the last day, he expressly declares the terms upon which the faithful will be admitted to the participation of eternal glory. The particular conditions of acceptance there enumerated, are the discharge of the duties of brotherly love and compassion. "Inasmuch as ye have done it
 " unto

“ unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” On the other hand, he will say to the wicked, “ Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not unto me.” Can any thing more plainly ascertain the conduct by which our salvation is to be accomplished ? Can any thing more unequivocally shew, that he who refuses the charitable assistance to his unfortunate brethren, which it is in his power to give, denies Christ before men, and will be denied by him before his Father who is in Heaven ?

But it is not only in this prostitution of the riches of the world to the purposes of luxury and voluptuousness, that the mercies of God are abused, and turned into the channels of iniquity. All the endowments of the mind, all the superior claims of the intellectual faculties, are the voluntary gifts of Divine Goodness. Yet how often do we see the powers of wit, and the penetration of learning, ranged under the banners of vice and infidelity ! How often do we behold

hold men endued with the ability to convince the ignorant of their duty by force of argument, and animate the obdurate to the discharge of it by the graces of persuasion and eloquence ! How often do we behold such men disseminating the worst of poison among their brethren, calling good evil, and evil good, and sedulously exerting their abilities to extend the boundaries of iniquity and immorality ! Nay, some of them, not satisfied with corrupting the easy, and seducing the unwary, have so far advanced in this system of wickedness, as to turn the arms of learning against the Almighty himself, either for the purpose of gratifying the vanity of ostentation, or pursuing the pleasures of sin without check ! They have dared not only to arraign the measures of God's administration, but even to deny his existence, to scoff at the means of grace, and renounce the hope of glory ! As the intellectual faculties are talents committed to our trust, he doubtless, who imparted them, will require an account how they have been employed ; and let us re-

E

member

member that this enquiry will be made by Him who cannot be deceived.

The most general way, however, of mens denying Christ," is in sacrificing their duty to the temptations of pleasure or interest. Poverty is looked upon as so great an evil, and an object of such universal dread, that every one is, if not active in his endeavours, at least sincere in his wishes, to escape it. Nor are we prohibited, either by reason or religion, from obviating its miserable effects. But when interest is opposed to morality, and temporal good to the express dictates of religion, we should consider, before we decide in our choice, what is to be gained on the one side, and lost on the other; for though poverty be in reality a great evil, it may be remedied by one still greater. He who procures an exemption from it by denying his Saviour; that is, by violating his duty as a Christian, acquires a present advantage at the hazard of future misery. He gains a felicity that cannot be kept long, and at the same time exposes himself

self to eternal punishment. He perhaps destroys his peace of mind in this world, and forfeits everlasting happiness in the next. Yet so much does the present outweigh the future, not that temporal good is superior in value, but because its gratifications are immediate, that men hesitate not to sacrifice their conscience, their virtue, and religion, for the enjoyments of a moment ! When a man indeed, harraſſed by the ſharp neceſſities of extreme indigence, is tempted to mitigate his diſtreſs by diſhoneſty, this deviation from his duty admits of ſome excuſe ; and no charitable perſon can arraign his guilt with ſeverity. But how many, placed far above want, and ſometimes poſſeſſed of more than they can expend during the term of their lives, deny their Lord and Saviour, and engage in any ſcheme, however iniquitous it may be, that ſeems likely to add to their revenues ! It remains, therefore, that ſuch men be informed what the conſequences will be of being denied by Chriſt before his Father, who is in Heaven.

The joys of Heaven are represented as surpassing the powers of human conception: they are described to be such as "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive." The miseries, on the other hand, of the state of condemnation, may well be supposed such, as no ideas of what we suffer here can give us adequate conceptions of. And if a criminal trembles at the bar of an earthly tribunal, terrified at the punishment which he imagines the violated laws of his country will inflict, how much more will the wicked tremble when arraigned before the tribunal of Him, whose sentence will doom them to that place of torture where the worm never dieth, where the penal fire is never extinguished! Before that Judge we must all finally appear: "The day will come, when the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible; when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality." Then shall we stand before that Saviour who died for our sins, and rose again
for

for our justification. Is it a matter of trifling importance how we appear at this awful juncture? Can we reflect upon the day of final judgment, without considering the solemn, the ir retrievable issues of it? "Whosoever shall deny me before men," "him will I also deny before my Father" "who is in Heaven." These are the words of him who is to be our Judge: meditate upon them, ye men of the world, and ere the night of darkness intercept your licentious pursuits, consider that the gain, even of universal empire, is no equivalent for the loss of your souls! If ye prefer the pleasures of sin to the precepts of religion, ye deny your Saviour; ye abjure his service, and render yourselves unworthy of that inheritance which he hath secured to us by his death and sufferings: consequently, he will deny you before his Father who is in Heaven; he will renounce you as unprofitable servants, and reject you, saying, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

May we then so contemplate these things,
as to avoid this terrible denunciation ! May
we, as the apostle directs us, “ be stedfast,
“ unmoveable, always abounding in the
“ work of the Lord ; forasmuch as we know
“ that our labour is not in vain in the Lord ;
“ for whosoever shall confess him before
“ men, him will he confess also before his
“ Father who is in Heaven,”

SERMON

SERMON IV.

ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS,
chap. v. ver. 8.

*Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye
light in the Lord: walk as children of
light.*

SAINTE Paul, in the three last chapters of his epistle to the Ephesians, enters into a copious detail of the various duties, both religious and relative, which they were called upon as Christians to perform. The Jews, thinking themselves entitled to the exclusive favour and protection of God, denied that the rest of the world would be admitted to any share in the blessings of the Messiah, unless they first embraced the Jewish religion. The apostle, therefore,

shews them the fallacy of this doctrine, and endeavours to confirm them in the right faith. He also lays before them the corruptions and disorders which prevailed before the introduction of Christianity; these he contrasts with the pure virtues of the gospel, and informs his converts that they were to prove the sincerity of their new professions by newness of life, by an uniform acquiescence to the system of religion introduced by the Son of God, and promulgated by his apostles. "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light." In these words are represented their former and their present condition, and what was required of them on the latter account. Truth, in the language of Scripture, is expressed by the word LIGHT; error, by that of DARKNESS. The meaning of the apostle then is, ye were formerly enveloped in the mists of intellectual darkness, ye were ignorant of your duty to God and your brethren, slaves to superstition and idolatry; but now, since the Sun of righteousness hath shone in
the

the world, these clouds are dispersed; ye no longer sit in the valley of the shadow of death, but are illuminated by the pure rays of life and immortality. Ought not your actions to bear witness to this glorious change? Thus called into the light of truth, and emancipated from the bondage of sin, will ye still pursue that line of conduct which ignorance alone could excuse? Will ye render vain the grace of God, and renounce the salvation which is proffered, by refusing to comply with the terms of acceptance? Walk, therefore, as children of light, and as ye have the means of grace, use them to the attainment of everlasting happiness! For since ye can no longer plead ignorance of your duty, just and deserving will your condemnation be, if ye still continue in the paths of error, and shut your eyes against that luminous evidence which God hath vouchsafed to impart.

The darkness which the apostle speaks of, arose from the erroneous and corrupted ideas of the heathen world in religious matters.

ters. Their worship was compounded of idolatry and absurdity. They adored a number of deities; and though there was one to whom they assigned power and authority over the rest, yet he is represented as restrained by uncontrollable fate. Some of these gods were local: — the adoration of them was confined to particular places, and their celestial influence supposed to be restricted in the same manner. But it is impossible to read the accounts of their deities, as they stand in the records of antiquity, without disgust and abhorrence. They are described as actuated by human passions; enflamed by anger, warped by prejudice, perverted by partiality, and tortured by suspicion. Nay, further, we are informed that they were frequently slaves to lust; and they often descended from their heavenly mansions to prosecute the licentious purposes of intemperance and voluptuousness upon earth. We cannot then surely wonder that vice, immorality, and profaneness, should have prevailed among people who could reconcile the adoration of such beings

beings with the common principles of reason. The Athenians are recorded to have been the most refined and polished people of antiquity, even a nation of philosophers; yet so defective were they in religious knowledge, so ignorant of what alone constitutes true piety, that they had altars erected to the unknown God. The Romans, at the time of our Saviour's appearance, the undisputed masters of the world, were overwhelmed in luxury. They had entirely degenerated from the simple virtues of their ancestors; those virtues by which the foundations of their enormous and wonderful empire had been laid. With regard to religion, idolatry was so aggravated by voluptuousness, that temples had been dedicated to vices, such as Envy and Impurity. In those times, however, depraved and abandoned as they were, some men appeared, whose writings have received the praises and admiration of all succeeding ages; men, who recommended the obligations of virtue and morality with all the charms and graces of language, and enforced

ced the relative duties with all the strength of argument. Yet what could be expected from the efforts of human reason thus assisted by the powers of eloquence? The grandest and most forcible motive to a virtuous life was still wanting; namely, the firm conviction of a future state, where the seemingly irregular and unequal dispensations in this present one would be vindicated by the punishment of vice, and the eternal happiness of virtue. Many, indeed, whose views were enlarged by learning, adopted this belief, finding it to be the only effectual source of consolation, amidst the complicated miseries of their present existence; and the only refuge against the gloomy terrors of death: yet this was merely hope, not certainty. The soul, it is true, panted after immortality, as its sovereign good; nevertheless, all the arguments drawn from enquiry into the nature of the soul, and the consideration of the unaccountable disorders visible in this world, terminated at last in conjecture and probability. And if mere wishes were all that men of the most enlightened

lightened intellects could attain, what must have been the condition of the bulk of mankind, who had not even understanding sufficient to lead them to a well-grounded expectation of immortality ! When all their prospects were confined to the precarious tenure of this life, they must have been alone anxious after those things which could bestow earthly good ; and we need not wonder that some of them exclaimed, " Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." When temporal interest opposed the precepts of morality, it was not surprising that the gratification of the former should overpower all the claims of the latter, since the mind paid very little attention to the awful consequences of futurity. Such was the darkness that overwhelmed the heathen nations, touching the two grand articles of religion ; just ideas of one supreme Creator and Governor, and a firm assurance of a future state.

The Jews, on the other hand, had juster notions of the Deity. His power and majesty

jesty had, for a great number of years, been
 visibly displayed in their behalf, and con-
 sequently, had attracted their homage and
 veneration. But his mercy and goodness
 were very much circumscribed in their par-
 tial ideas. They looked upon him as the
 God of Israel, but believed him indifferent
 to the interests of the rest of the world, and
 proudly concluded, that the peculiar marks
 of his favour, so repeatedly given to their
 nation, would distinguish them for ever.
 Their ideas of another life were also weak
 and imperfect. If some did believe it,
 others we know openly maintained a con-
 trary doctrine. The blessings which God
 had hitherto imparted to his chosen people,
 had been in general temporal; abundance
 and freedom; for the arm of the Most High
 was, upon almost all occasions, stretched out
 in their behalf to secure to them plenty,
 and rescue them from the hands of their
 enemies. Many strong intimations were
 given them of one who should be their
 Deliverer; and his office, his sufferings, and
 death, were so pointedly described, as to
 leave

leave little doubt that all these prophecies relative to their Messiah, were fulfilled in the sacred person of Jesus Christ. Two things, however, induced this selfish and bigotted people to reject their Redeemer when he did appear, and to deny his divinity, in spite of all the evidence by which it was supported. Looking back to their past annals, they saw them dignified with wealth and empire. They, therefore, thought that their Saviour would again reinstate them in imperial grandeur; and, from these ambitious ideas, they spurned that religion which, though it promised them everlasting glory and happiness in the world to come, seemed to ensure to them nothing but shame and misery in this. Besides this, they could not brook that the Gentiles should be invited to a participation of the benefits of the gospel. They looked upon them as miserable outcasts; and, because they had not as yet been signalized by the avowed favour of God, they concluded that they never would be, on account of their unworthiness. This likewise

wife impelled them to renounce the terms of salvation ; for they considered the communication of God's grace to the heathens, as a subduction from their own importance, and a material abridgment of those privileges which, in their own opinion, they only were entitled to the possession of.

Such was the darkness of ignorance among the heathens, and such the darkness of bigotry, by which the Jews were blinded, when the Son of God vouchsafed to stoop from the throne of his glory, to take upon him the form of man, to endure sorrow and grief ; and finally, to undergo an ignominious death, that expiation might be made for the sins of the whole world. It has been objected, that mankind, lost as they were in iniquity and wickedness, were utterly unworthy of such an atonement ; and that it seems inconsistent with the justice of the Supreme Being for an innocent and immaculate person to be sacrificed for the safety of the guilty and polluted. This is perhaps one of those mysteries which human reason

reason cannot fathom ; one of those ways in which Divine Providence hath chosen to display its goodness, that is beyond our limited faculties to comprehend. We must here exclaim, " Oh the depth of the riches " both of the wisdom and knowledge of " God ! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out ! " But although it be impossible for us, precisely, to comprehend the reasons that induced the Almighty thus wonderfully to display his mercy towards such unworthy objects, yet surely, the more exalted the means were which it pleased him to employ in the redemption of mankind, the stronger are the ties that bind us to be thankful for them. Instead of objecting to the salvation offered us through the merits and death of Jesus Christ, because it seems to be so far beyond our deserts, we ought, conscious that immortal life may be thus secured, " to draw near with a true heart, " in full assurance of faith, having our " heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, " and

"and our bodies : washed with pure
"water." and

Numbers, indeed, notwithstanding the glorious evidence of the truth of the gospel, though it is built upon a rock which the gates of hell have not been able to prevail against, still reject the religion of their Redeemer, and refuse to hear the voice of the Charmer, charm he never so wisely. But does this aversion to Christianity arise from reflection? Have these persons examined the arguments upon which the truth of the gospel rests, with that candour and deliberation which so important an enquiry demands? God gave reason to man, that he might distinguish good from evil, and be hence enabled to prosecute happiness, and avoid misery. Have they consulted this reason in their religious investigations? Is it to her mature decisions that they have referred the question, and from thence obtained the information, that the Christian system is merely the political invention of men, framed for the sole purpose of adjusting

ing the civil interests of society ? Alas ! such unbelievers, in general, have too much of their time taken up in other matters ; and as they have not leisure, so neither have they inclination to enter upon these serious disquisitions. They are too much attached to the pleasures of sense, to receive any satisfaction from those of the spirit, and too much captivated by the gratifications of this world, to enquire what may be the consequences in the next. But will these consequences be altered or averted by such conduct ? Because it is the interest of the libertine and the infidel that there should be no future state, does it follow that there will be none ? Will the matter turn out implicitly as they wish and desire ? Whether there be just ground for the belief of another life ; whether the gospel of Christ, which promises so much to the faithful, and threatens so much to the disobedient, bear indisputable marks of being the power of God unto salvation, these are subjects too awful to be treated with levity and indifference, and too important

to be rejected for the fugitive enjoyments of the world. Some who had entertained doubts concerning these points, and had been, from their infidelity, avowed libertines, were at last induced, by the importance of the subject, to enter into a calm discussion of the truth of the Christian religion. Their deliberate investigations terminated, where it is probable they will ever conduct those who study only to attain truth, in a firm conviction of the divinity of our Redeemer. Have any of you similar doubts? You cannot do better than adopt the same plan. But remember, as it is a spiritual enquiry, you must disengage yourselves from all earthly prejudices, and not suffer worldly interests to overpower substantial argument. — With regard to those whose faith is already established, it is their business to consider the indispensable duties which they are called upon to perform. If we are convinced that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, that he came down from Heaven, dwelt upon earth in an human form, and patiently submitted to death

death upon the cross, that he might redeem men from the bondage of sin, and open to us the gates of everlasting life; if we believe all this, shall we still walk in darkness? And while we acknowledge the light which God hath vouchsafed to impart, shall our actions and pursuits be those of heathen ignorance? Christ died for our sins, and shall we live so as to forfeit the benefits of his death and passion? The former times of ignorance God winked at. But if his mercy spared those who wandered for want of light to direct their steps, his indignation will assuredly fall upon us who reject the Guide which he hath given. Though the precepts of our holy religion oppose the licentious pleasures of the world, let us reflect, that he who indulges himself in the latter, counteracts his salvation, and renders the merits of his Redeemer inefficacious. No wise man refuses a medicine, however nauseous its ingredients may be to the palate, which he knows will re-establish his health. And shall we be less attentive to those things which belong to our eternal

welfare? Shall we be anxious after those delights which are but for a moment, and regardless of those treasures that are immortal and incorruptible? Let all who have hitherto embraced this delusion; who, though they believe, yet have acted as if they disbelieved, and exhibited a line of conduct repugnant to their professions; let them meditate in time upon the dreadful consequences of such inconsistent behaviour! Life and death are set before us; the duties are propounded in scripture, by which we may inherit everlasting happiness. Can we believe this scripture to be the word of God, yet disobey its precepts, without considering that we disobey Him who hath the power of life and death, who can make us eternally happy or eternally miserable? We assemble in the temple of this Almighty Being, to return our thanks to the Father of all mercies for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory; let not our gratitude then rest in mere words; in the mere homage of the lips! Let the consciousness that we are no longer darkness

ness, but are now light in the Lord, attend us in the walks of life, and influence our conduct in the various departments to which Providence calls us ! May God, therefore, to whom we offer up our prayers, grant that the words which we hear in his temple with our outward ears, may, through his grace, be so grafted inwardly in our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honour and praise of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord !

lets, but are now light in the Lord, at-
tend us in the walks of life and influence
our conduct in the various appointments to
which Providence calls us. May God
direct us to whom we offer up our
prayer, that the work which we bear in his
people with our outward ears may, through
his grace, be so kindled inwardly, in our
hearts, that they may bring forth in the
fruit of good living, to the honour and
praise of his name, through Jesus Christ our
Lord!

SERMON

SERMON V.

EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS,
chap. i. ver. 16.

*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it
is the power of God unto salvation.*

BEFORE a Christian audience, it can never be unseasonable to enumerate and enforce the arguments that established their faith. It is particularly proper, when we commemorate, as we do this day, a great event in the system of our holy religion; for, unless we firmly believe the gospel of Christ to be the power of God unto salvation, it is hardly possible that we should walk securely, amidst the manifold

fold snares and temptations of the world, and keep the faith which we have professed, inviolate.

I will, therefore, in this Discourse, consider the truth of the gospel under three heads: First, With regard to the state of the world at the time when the apostles entered upon their ministry; Secondly, As to the nature and doctrines of Christianity; and, Lastly, Touching the characters and situations of its first propagators.

The world, at the commencement of the Christian æra, was divided into two classes; Gentiles and Jews. The former were universally victims to the grossest idolatry. Besides sacrificing and paying divine honours to imaginary deities, they were so far infatuated, that they consecrated temples to mere names, and those even of vices. Rome, at that time the mistress of the discovered world, was virtually fallen: she could no longer display the bright and ample catalogue of virtues by which the
republic

republic had been so conspicuously distinguished. That once renowned city was a deplorable scene of luxury, corruption, and debauchery, the sure offspring of extended empire. The body indeed was great, but it was the corpulence of languor and decay, not that of health and vigour. And though it be true that learning was then arrived at the highest point of excellence, it is equally as true, that vice was in its meridian also. Probably, there were men, even in this state of general depravity, who saw the absurdity of their religious tenets, and internally condemned the reigning idolatry. Yet none of them had the virtue to oppose the torrent, and introduce a purer, a more rational system of religion. Nay, if there had been men of abilities sufficient to expose the errors of the world, and determined to persevere in the cause of reformation, they could have expected but a poor harvest from their intelligent and active efforts. They could not have flattered themselves that any great attention or deference would have been paid to their admonitions.

monitions. Can we then suppose that a set of men, resolved to establish the gospel of Christ, could have done it effectually among people so depraved? I mean, of themselves, unassisted by the power of God. Can we think that the Gentiles, nursed in the lap of voluptuousness, confirmed by daily practice in immorality and dissipation, and slaves to the prejudices of superstition, would attend to the simple unrefined precepts of Christ—precepts that in every point contradicted their manner of living? Let us suppose that a preacher of the gospel came to Rome, and told the people that the Saviour of the world, the Son of the true and living God, had been born in extreme poverty, uniformly persecuted through life, and cut off by a cruel and ignominious death; that, notwithstanding these humiliating circumstances, there would be no happiness for them hereafter, unless they adopted his precepts, and became members of his church,—would they not have regarded our Redeemer as an impostor, and his apostles (who were Jews of a nation

a nation which they held in supreme contempt) as the artful abettors of an impostor? We may then fairly conclude, that no human eloquence could have so operated upon the minds of the Gentiles, that they should embrace the gospel with such zeal as many of them actually did:

Nor could a more favourable reception have been expected from the Jews. They, presuming upon their own consequence, that they were the only people in covenant with God, proudly considered themselves as having the exclusive right to divine favour. Educated in the strong prejudices of this opinion, they could hardly admit that religion, which promised universal redemption, and excluded no nation from the light of God's countenance. In addition to this inveterate prepossession in their own favour, they arrayed their Redeemer in the robes of earthly majesty: — they looked for a glorious triumphant prince, who should exalt their church and nation to the highest pinnacle of external greatness and splendor; who

who should, indeed, become the wonder and amazement, but not the Saviour, of the Gentile world. These partial notions were so deeply rooted in them, that the very apostles did, in a great measure, retain them till St. Peter was convinced of their fallacy, as we are informed in the tenth chapter of the Acts. — It could not, therefore, be supposed that the Jews, heated by such expectations, and biased by such prejudices, would receive for their Messiah one born in the lowest state of poverty; one whose whole life was an uniform scene of humility and persecution, and which was openly terminated by an ignominious death.

We cannot then account for the rapid progress of the gospel, from a consideration of the state of the world at that time. Human learning and eloquence, exerted to the utmost, would never have been able to counteract the radical prejudices of those days, and establish a religion like that of our blessed Redeemer. Which reflection leads me to the second point proposed for
discuf-

discussion, namely, what was the nature of the gospel, and the doctrine of the apostles.

Though the Christian system is now generally acknowledged to possess such superior advantages, that even its enemies have declared it better framed to promote peace and happiness in society, than any other that has hitherto been devised by philosophers or legislators, yet is it, even now, a most difficult task to submit to the proposed rule of faith. Freed, as we happily are, from the terrors of persecution, from the arm of vindictive authority, and the apprehensions of a cruel and unjust death, how many of its positive precepts do we daily transgress! and how many of its hallowed commands do we daily violate! Can we then forbear to wonder at the rapid progress of Christianity? Great numbers, we read, were daily added to the church: Can we subscribe to the truth of that assertion, without saying, with St. Paul, "That the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation?"

Christi-

Christianity carried moral obligations to an higher point than they had ever attained before. Our divine Master not only exclaimed against the actual perpetration of crimes, but even denounced the vengeance of Heaven against the secret inward emotions of vice and iniquity. Gratitude had, in every age and in every country, been esteemed a virtue of the first order. But our Saviour transcends all former sentiments on this head. Not content merely to say that it is our duty to love those by whose benevolence we have been distinguished, his unbounded philanthropy delivers this rule: " Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you." In short, not to trouble you with any more references, if we peruse our Saviour's sermon on the mount (which may be properly called an abstract of the Christian doctrines) we shall find it to consist of a number of precepts to which the pride and infirmity of man can, but with great difficulty and self-denial, submit. Our Lord told his dis-

ciples, that they must relinquish all the conveniences of life, and expose themselves to all the distresses and accumulated miseries of contempt and poverty; that they must experience all the sharp evils which the iron hand of persecution, supported by the authority of kings and princes, could inflict. He plainly informed them, that, besides this laborious and painful conflict with external opposition, they must triumph over their own feelings as men, suppress every malevolent impulse of their own thoughts, discard every insinuation of pride, stifle the remonstrances of revenge, and pour forth no complaints in the fiery trial. To believe that human wisdom and the arguments of man could conciliate disciples ready to engage in the work under such visible disadvantages, and in defence of doctrines so repugnant to the reigning pursuits of flesh and blood, would be to give our assent to a thing equally wonderful with any of the miracles that the first teachers of our holy religion performed. Here we must again trace the effect to the real cause; that is, that

it

it was produced by the power of God. To establish which decision upon still firmer ground, I shall, in the third place, enquire into the characters and situations of those who were commissioned to propagate this new system of salvation.

Had the men unto whom our Lord delegated this arduous, this perilous trust, been, before their appointment distinguished in the world; had they been able by their wealth to purchase votaries, or from their rank in life to command the deference of the people; or had they been selected from the *literati* of the Jewish nation, and by that means capable of persuading their hearers by the force of eloquence; — had these circumstances been the case, infidels would have plausible reasons to urge in their behalf; they might assert that the effects produced by the preaching of the apostles, were no more than what repeatedly result from the influence of riches, from the weight of authority, and the operation of human learning. But they are cut off from this plea.

plea. For what were the apostles? They were men, not such as an impostor would have chosen, rich, powerful, and eloquent; but persons called from the lowest departments of life; tax-gatherers (a profession despicable in the estimation of the Jews); indigent, unlettered fishermen, mean in themselves, as mean in their education. Yet these very men, these obscure illiterate persons did Christ depute his missionaries, and commanded them to go and teach all nations. And how were they to execute this commission in their present insufficient state? What attention could they command, what profelytes could they expect to make, even in their own country? The apostles were undoubtedly well known in Judea. It is improbable that they could of themselves acquire much credit even at home; for their circumstances seemed more calculated to draw upon them the contempt and scorn, than attract the esteem and respect of their countrymen. But what shall we say when we find them preaching the gospel of Christ, and expounding his holy mysteries in foreign regions?

Nay, with such energy and success, that people of different languages from their own, yielded to the force of their arguments; and in great numbers embraced the Christian faith! How can we account for this astonishing effect by recurring to the efficacy of natural causes? The apostles must have possessed the gift of tongues, and the power of working miracles, otherwise their labours, however diligent and persevering, could not have been so successful. Strangers would hardly have given credit to obscure unknown persons, and believed their assertions, merely because they were vehemently and confidently urged. And how could they understand the language of foreign nations but by the power of God? If they had acquired this knowledge by the help of men, that would have been inevitably discovered. If we should say, by their own sagacity and industry, that is too improbable to be admitted. In short, whether without or with the assistance of others, the work would have demanded the unremitted toil of years. We have likewise a very strong proof of
their

their inspiration, in the unshaken fortitude with which they encountered the virulent opposition uniformly exerted against them. Previous to our Saviour's ascension, several of them had entertained doubts of his divinity; and all of them (when the storm fell upon him, and he was carried to the tribunal of Pilate) were wrapped up alone in their own private security. At that perilous crisis, they all forsook him and fled. But after his ascension, when they went forth without their Master, we find them resolute and undaunted, ready to stem all opposition, and undergo the most severe trials. They are no longer distracted by doubts, no longer harassed by wavering opinions, but all content, and willing to sacrifice their lives in support of their religion.

To God alone can this persevering fortitude be ascribed; to Him only who, by means of despised and illiterate agents, can overthrow the power of the strongest, and confound the learning of the most wise; and by causes, apparently the most repug-

nant to the purpose, work out and firmly establish his own honour.

We have, then, the most indubitable evidence that any impartial person can fairly require, that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation ; that it is not merely (what some unbelievers have endeavoured to prove) a rule of moral conduct, politically countenanced by earthly legislators for the sole purpose of promoting peace and enforcing subjection in this life, but that it is the immediate work of heavenly mercy ; and without receiving it under that gracious title, we renounce all claim to eternal happiness. If we reject such numerous, such strong testimonies as those that the scripture lays before us, just and deserving will our final condemnation be.

We are this day met in the temple of the Almighty to commemorate the nativity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ; and, as we avow ourselves Christians by this act of adoration, it much behoves us maturely to weigh the consequences of a firm belief,
and

and the contrary issues of incredulity. If we admit the reality of our Saviour's divinity, and acknowledge the arguments in vindication of the gospel to be incontrovertible, yet at the same time live in direct opposition to the principles of our holy religion, we render ourselves highly obnoxious to the fatal terrors of the wrath of God.

Let us, therefore, bending with grateful submission before the throne of grace, praise God that he hath vouchsafed, in his infinite mercy, to send his Son upon earth for our deliverance from the bondage of sin, and to confirm his divine mission by so many strong arguments, that we have every thing we can reasonably desire to support and invigorate our faith. Let us shew ourselves true believers in Christ. Conscious of our manifold imperfections, but penitentially confiding in the saving health procured for us by his mediation, let us go to his altar with all due reverence!—If any of you, when you review your past actions, are

wounded by the painful recollection of unatoned transgressions, remember that the blood of Christ alone can obliterate the deep stains of your iniquity, and endeavour, while it is yet the day of grace, to reap the benefits of his precious death and passion ! By the sacrifice which he offered up in his own pure immaculate person, he hath indeed redeemed all mankind from the penalty of original sin ; but it rests with us whether we shall finally be enrolled in the blessed number of those who will be found worthy of receiving the everlasting reward.

Therefore, while we externally with our lips commemorate the exceeding great love of our Lord and Master, let the devout consideration of it sink deep into our hearts ! Let the efficacy of our verbal acknowledgments appear in prompting us to works of piety and beneficence ; to an imitation of him, whose whole life was one uniform scene of active benevolence and universal charity.

Happy

Happy shall we be, happy far beyond any thing this earthly vale affords, if, amidst the opposing interests of the world, the allurements of pleasure, and the scoffs of infidelity, we shall be able to say with the faith of the apostle, " We are not ashamed " of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power " of God unto salvation."

...the spreading impact of the world, the al-
lowance of pleasure and the right of in-
terference with the able to live with the
rank of the apostles. It is not attained
of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power
of God unto salvation.

SERMON

SERMON VI.

PSALM iv. ver. 6.

There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.

IF we look into the world, and examine the various pursuits of men, we shall find that numbers are baffled in their expectations; that they are frequently disappointed of those things, to attain which, they have industriously exerted all their abilities, both of body and mind; we shall also see many, after the accomplishment of their first wishes, still unsatisfied. Some persons, by the acquisition of one object, find their
views

views enlarged, and look upon what they have gained only advantageous as it may enable them to acquire something more considerable. They are, therefore, again hurried into the tumult of contest, and again experience all the anxiety which attends a state of uncertainty. Others are uneasy in the midst of their success, because their attainments fall short of their ideas. In the ardour of our pursuit, imagination paints the object aimed at in the fairest colours: fancy decorates it with all possible good, and detaches from it whatever can diminish its value, or darken its lustre. As a small building, seen through a mist, appears to the eye of the beholder considerably enlarged beyond its real dimensions, so a future advantage, surveyed through the delusive medium which the passions interpose, appears grand and magnificent. But when the traveller comes up to the former, his erroneous notions are immediately corrected, and the preconceived magnitude of the edifice is obliterated by ocular proof of its humility. In the same manner the possession

session of the latter unfolds its real nature. All the defects, which were before concealed by the intervening distance of the object, or glossed over by the powerful illusions of prejudice, obtrude themselves now in their native forms. He who was animated in the pursuit, by the hope of obtaining perfect happiness, finds himself deceived : and if the powers of his mind be so far depressed, as to hinder him from striking out into some new line of action, he cannot but be the prey of mortification, because he is sensible that he has toiled for that which does not amply reward his labour, and that he has consumed part of his days in the unprofitable prosecution of that which cannot secure the felicity of those which are to come.

Since happiness ever has been, and ever must be, the ruling principle of a being endowed with reason, it is no wonder that so many disquisitions have appeared, from time to time, on this important subject. For what is there that can be conceived
more

more likely to engage universal attention, than that which is the universal object of our desires? Hence, among the philosophers of the ancient world, various sects were instituted, differing, indeed, in their particular doctrines, but all uniformly maintaining one point; that is, all professing to lead mankind to the supreme good. To examine or combat these opinions, would be a superfluous and an unseful task in the presence of a Christian audience, who have more sublime rules for the direction of their conduct than what result from the 'enticing words of man's wisdom.' It will be sufficient for me to form the plan of this Discourse upon two principles; which no one, I believe, will dare to controvert. The first is, That no good whatever can confer real happiness, unless it possess that perfection which can fully satisfy the mind. The second is, That although it be sufficient for the present, if its duration be limited, or uncertain, it is still incomplete, and unworthy the title which it assumes. Hence it follows, that perfection and security of continuance,

continuance, are essential qualities of true happiness. A reference to these two particulars will be of great use in the examination of this subject, and will finally lead us to the knowledge of our highest interests; namely, to the object on which our wishes may be safely placed, without any fear of disappointment, without any apprehension of alteration, or any dread lest time should impair the foundations of our bliss, render it less complete by diminution, or less satisfactory from satiety and disgust.

The passions which originally direct the operations of mankind, which colour and animate the scenes of life, are few. But as the stream, in its progress, often varies its course, and by repeatedly diverging, branches out into many channels, which, though different in their directions, may be all traced to the same source,—so the passions of men, from diversity of disposition or situation, from casual occurrences and temporary opportunities, unfold themselves in various modes: yet, diversified as these combinations

tions are, and various as the effects are produced from them, they may all be resolved into the same primary elements. Amidst the manifold pursuits of human beings, there are three objects which take the lead, and to which all the others may be reduced; pleasure, riches, and honour. But all the actions which result from an attachment to these, are ascribable to the desire of happiness. "Who will shew us any good?" is the universal question; and whenever an answer is given, there are thousands always ready to act in compliance with it. In consequence of this, appearances are substituted for realities. — "Man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain:" after all his labours, both of body and mind, he finds that the toil is "vanity and vexation of spirit." This will sufficiently appear by an investigation of the subject. In examining the first article, I mean to treat only of that pleasure which flows from sensual gratifications and worldly enjoyments.

What

What numbers are there, so lost to the exalted rank which they hold in the creation, and so regardless of the several obligations they are under to God and man, that their hours are consumed in sensuality and voluptuousness ! Every thought is discarded from their minds, save what can awaken festivity, or suggest some new gratification. The former part of the day is spent in devising schemes how the course of pleasure may be kept up, and the evening employed in executing them. That such is the life of many we all know. — Years pass away, and recollection perhaps can call back to the memory no one action where the interests of virtue or religion have been intentionally consulted ; and if any benefit appears to have flowed from them to their brethren, it must be imputed to accident, as to themselves ; it must be ascribed to the invisible agency of that Providence which can extract good from evil. But do the plans of these men merit the title of wisdom, or secure the possession of happiness ? The votaries of sensuality, undoubtedly, be-

lieve the latter, otherwise they would hardly sacrifice every other consideration to the claims of luxury. Now the human body is so framed and fashioned by the hand of Nature, that the health and stability of it can alone be preserved, with any degree of certainty, by temperance. Repletion dilates the corporal vessels beyond what they are able to bear; and we daily see the voluptuary sinking under the weight of languor and debility, or racked by pain and torture. We frequently behold him enervated and emaciated, and prematurely labouring under the maladies which accompany old age. Thus, he either falls a victim to death before the natural period, or drags on a miserable existence, cut off from the common enjoyments of life. Some, indeed there are, who, by the original strength of their constitution, stand for years seemingly unimpaired, and revel in the fruition of their licentious wishes, without any visible signs of infirmity; as there are trees of so deep a root, and so firm a texture, that they for a long time brave the rigour of inclement

element seasons, and defy the furious assaults of storms and tempests:—yet still this boasted stability is at best temporary. The machine will, in spite of the strength and solidity of its materials, wear out at last; and we know that there are a thousand casualties which no human efforts can always obviate, because they cannot foresee them able in a moment to suspend and annihilate all its functions. The delights which are enjoyed in the fire and vigour of youth, cannot be prolonged, at least, with equal satisfaction, beyond the term of youth; and though habit and custom may afterwards attach us to the same pursuits, the expected gratifications must be comparatively faint and imperfect. The comforts of old age arise principally from reflection: in the declining years of life, the powers of the body are too weak to engage in scenes of tumult and contention; and the consciousness that our present existence cannot but be short, must of course damp the spirit of enterprize, and deaden the fire of activity, if any sparks of it yet survive.

For what temptation is there to encounter toil and danger when the possession of that which we labour after may probably be cut off for ever, in the very moment of acquisition ? The highest, and indeed the only pure consolation that attends a man in his last years, springs from the remembrance of virtuous actions. He who, when arrived at the confines of the next world, can reflect that he has done his duty in this, that he has acknowledged no other impulse than the glory of God and the good of man, and that he leaves behind him an example to animate others ; such a person is calm and tranquil ; for he possesses that peace which passeth all understanding, and anticipates those joys which transcend all description. But what is there, in the same circumstances, to console the mind of him who, through life, has felt no other influence than that of sensual pleasures ? He is now past the enjoyment of all that once soothed his appetite, and gratified his desires. In the retrospect of his misspent days, he must be conscious that he hath encouraged

raged vice by his example, and that, therefore, he may probably have entailed upon numbers misery in this world, and exposed them to punishment in the next. It will be in vain for him now to say, Who will shew me any good ? The time is elapsed for the adoption of a new system ; and he finds himself arrived at the hour of death, tormented by the thought that he hath omitted every thing that can mitigate the terrors of the day of judgment.

Riches are another object which men, from the generality and ardour of the pursuit, seem to think competent to happiness. It cannot be denied, that, in the hands of religious and charitable men, they are productive of eminent advantages. Wealth, directed into its proper channels, enlarges the sphere of public good, by animating the efforts of honest industry ; and diminishes the weight of misery, by alleviating the sufferings of the unfortunate. Thus used, it is a means of conciliating the favour of God, and, consequently, a means

of happiness : but is this direction of wealth the general practice of mankind ? Do men labour after wealth for the sole purpose of increasing their power to do good ? Alas ! the very reverse is but too frequently the case. The desire of accumulation, for the most part, owes its birth to interested motives ; and accordingly, the only end proposed in amassing treasures, is the gratification of private views. We see many sedulously employed in piling one heap upon another, and daily adding to their stores, not with the generous wish to assist and relieve others, or with the selfish intention of furnishing luxurious enjoyments for themselves ; but their whole satisfaction seems to result from the mere article of augmenting their revenues : that riches in the possession of such men, contribute little or nothing towards happiness, is evident ; because he who has not the spirit either to make them instruments of good to himself or to his brethren, is rich only in idea, and no farther wealthy than any one who builds his opulence upon the baseless fabric of

of a dream. Besides, it is a known truth, that these misers are a continual prey to apprehension and suspicion ; knowing how little they are entitled to the friendly offices of others, they look with a jealous eye upon all : in avowed enemies they fancy a direct attack upon their dearest object ; and the protestations of amity and regard they impute to the same motive of plunder. Hence the dread of the first, and the want of confidence in the latter, are sufficient to poison every delight, and imbitter every moment of their existence. Nor can it be expected that the calamities of adversity, which hourly assail others, should entirely pass over them ; and it has been well observed by an * ancient historian, that the pleasure of possessing wealth is not so great as the mortification which attends the loss of it. But however light these attacks of fortune may be, and however faint the impression they make, there is one disturber of the avaricious man, which no artifice can

* Zenophon, Κυρου Παιδειας. lib. vii. p. 606.

elude, and no power can remove; namely, the certainty of death: he knows that the tenure of his wealth is uncertain, because his life is precarious; and if he is tortured by the consideration that he cannot carry it with him into the other world, he must, at the same time be sensible that, although he hath heaped up riches, he cannot tell who shall enjoy them, or to what purposes they may be applied. With regard to those who estimate the privileges of opulence only in proportion as they co-operate with the depravity of voluptuousness, there is no need to enlarge here, as the specious happiness of such has already been shewn to be always uncertain, and sometimes the foundation of temporal misery and wretchedness.

The last thing that was mentioned as exciting the pursuit of mortals, was honour. That this is not an inconsiderable object, is evident from the furious struggles in the world for power, and the vehement conflicts for elevation and precedence, which almost fill the pages of history: but it will
not

not require many words to shew that it is insufficient to the establishment of true happiness. The annals of mankind are, in a great degree, the narrative of efforts which ambition has erected for the attainment of power and dominion. No principles of virtue, no ties of justice, humanity, or religion, have been regarded when they opposed the progress to empire. Yet numerous are the instances which prove how little has been actually gained by the accomplishment of ambitious projects: the triumphs of one day have been blasted by defeat on the next: and the acquisition of one laurel has frequently had no other effect than to enlarge the scene of peril, and, by opening new prospects, to increase the weight of toil and care. If there be labour in the pursuit of honour, the post, when gained, is a post of envy, and therefore obnoxious to the hostility of men. Where there is danger, there is a necessity for vigilance; and where so much depends upon the precarious co-operation of fortune, there must be suspicion; and suspicion naturally creates

creates alarm and disquietude. Can such a state, then, be pronounced the residence of happiness? Honourable elevation rests upon the fluctuating point of chance; consequently the possession of it is insecure. And should it be preserved, the preservation of it will require daily circumspection; will call for the activity of incessant exertion. And that such requisites are incompatible with peace of mind, it needs no words to demonstrate.

Such are the principal objects of human pursuits, and such the vanity which attends them. David, who had learned wisdom in the sanctuary of the living God, and been taught the insufficiency of worldly good in the school of affliction, directs us at once to real happiness. "There be many that say, 'Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift 'thou up the light of thy countenance 'upon us.'—And what greater security can there be than the assistance of Almighty Power? Where can confidence be better placed than in the operations of Infinite Good-

Goodness? That God will assist those with his saving health who faithfully perform his will, we cannot doubt; for he has declared, "those that honour me, I will honour." In this world, indeed, where good and evil are promiscuously dispersed, the righteous may be oppressed by temporal calamities. But as they look not for complete exemption from human misery, they labour not under the burthen of insupportable disappointment. When the wicked fall in their schemes, and the snares of affliction compass them round about, there is nothing which can minister satisfactory consolation to their minds, for they have lost all that could animate their hopes; and the foundations upon which their felicity was erected, are overthrown. But it is not so with the just: "trouble and heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." When the storm of adversity bears hard upon them, when their fairest expectations in this life are defeated, or those are torn from them in whose society affection reposed its highest comforts upon earth,—as
men,

men, they cannot but feel the wound, and lament this separation from that which they held so dear. But when they enter into the sanctuary of the Lord, and call to mind the gracious promises of God; when they look to the end of their being, and consider it in those views which religion points out, they will be supplied with firmness to support the trial. The complacency of resignation will blunt the edge of calamity; and the light affliction, which is but for a moment, will appear nothing, when contrasted with the exceeding and eternal weight of glory laid up for the faithful in the kingdom of Heaven.—Whatever, therefore, our condition is in this life, we have no need to enquire of men, “Who will shew us any good?” Our merciful Creator, willing that no one of his children should perish, hath clearly and explicitly, by divine revelation, ascertained the means of grace, and laid before us rewards sufficient to animate the hope of glory. Happy is the man, who, possessed of abundance in this world, is rich also in good works; who is ready
to

to give, and glad to distribute; thus making to himself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, and rendering the corruptible treasures of this life instruments to procure the blessed inheritance of immortality. Let those, on the other hand, who feel the evils of poverty, and are, for that reason, despised and rejected of men, consider, that they are not upon that account abridged of the favour of God, nor excluded from any of the exalted privileges annexed to the protection of the Most High. The dignity of the proudest, and the riches of the wealthiest men, are nothing in the sight of Omnipotence. The wicked, perhaps, surrounded by pleasure and delight, may at present view the low estate of the righteous with scorn and contempt; but let them remember that their triumph must be short! that they are hastening to that place where all earthly distinctions will be obliterated; and when they stand before the tribunal of their Redeemer, they cannot expect to inherit that happiness, of which they refused the proffered

ferred terms. They will then say when they behold the glory of the just, We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour! How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the Saints!

SERMON

SERMON VII.

HEBREWS, chap. xiii. ver. 5.

*Let your conversation be without covetousness,
and be content with such things as ye have;
for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor
forsake thee.*

THAT riches do not constitute happiness, is a common and trite saying; a maxim, to the truth of which almost all men subscribe with their lips, and which almost all deny in their actions and pursuits. Whence cometh the tumult and bustle in the busy scenes of life? Whence arise the furious struggles for elevation and precedence, the emotions of envy, the joy and triumph of success, the grief and mortification

tification of disappointment? The desire of wealth generally operates as the ruling principle, and gives birth to the various commotions in the world. If a man wishes to enjoy the pleasures and luxuries of life, he naturally directs his attention to the attainment of riches as the means which can enable him to gratify his voluptuous desires. If he is zealous to acquire dignity and honour, he is also, in this case, impelled to the same pursuit; because he is convinced, from experience, that opulence, even without a single virtue to adorn it, extorts the homage and servility of needy dependents. When riches hold forth such powerful charms; when they seem possessed of every thing that can minister to the delights of sensuality, or gratify the arrogance of pride, we need not wonder that they should frequently silence the dictates of religion, and triumph over the claims of justice and humanity. The man who extends no thought beyond the present, and whose views are contracted within the narrow boundaries of temporal enjoyments, has but

but one motive of action. He knows no joy, except what results from success in his worldly schemes, nor experiences any anguish, save what arises from the mortification of defeat. But is it wisdom to adopt this line of conduct in life? Are the avenues that lead to wealth those that conduct our steps to peace and tranquillity? Various indeed are the projects which men daily form for the accomplishment of their wishes, and innumerable are the modes devised for the attainment of substantial good. However, as we are rational creatures, and consequently susceptible of the many emotions that arise from the operation of the rational faculties, it is impossible that external objects should be able to confer perfect happiness. If the pains of the body intercept the enjoyment of quiet, it is no less true that anxiety of mind is equally the embitterer of repose; and while we are agitated by the hope of good; or alarmed by the dread of evil; while we are harassed by suspicion, or tortured by apprehension, we cannot be happy. Let our possessions be

ever so great, our elevation above others ever so considerable, and our condition on this account ever so much an object of envy, we must still be conscious to ourselves that we are wretched, that the edifice of our welfare, magnificent as it appears to the eye of spectators, is built upon the shifting sand; that it totters at every blast that blows, and trembles at every flood that rises against it.

The youth just entering on the tumultuous stage of life, is animated with hope, and glows with the spirit of enterprize. In the fervour of active zeal he forms the plan of happiness, and draws from the successful issue of it a full completion of all his desires in this world. Yet how very seldom does the event perfectly gratify these warm expectations! Disappointment and defeat frequently nip the buds of hope, and overwhelm the mind with the gloom of despair. Even if fortune co-operate with the exertion, and success attend the endeavour to the extent of the most sanguine wish, how few feel

feel themselves perfectly satisfied! how few are content with that which they have acquired! Happiness is still to be sought. The field of action is enlarged, and what at first appeared capable of furnishing satisfactory bliss, seems now to be but a single step gained towards the acquisition of something really important, and essentially necessary to complete tranquillity. For instance, have riches been the object of pursuit? As they are now obtained, what remains but to relinquish the embarrassments of suspense, and to bid adieu to the struggles of competition, to close the scene of labour and sit down calmly to the enjoyment of the harvest? But is this the case? The perpetual distractions of the world and the general restlessness of mankind, give melancholy proof of the reverse. Wealth enlarges the confines of luxury, and extends the dominions of desire. A thousand things are crowded into the scale of our wants, of which the imagination never entertained an idea before. If the opulence which we have fortunately seized upon, secure to us

many gratifications, we feel at the same time a consciousness that an additional accumulation of it will put us in possession of many more. The envious man is tortured while he sees any one whom he is led to account happier than himself; and the ambitious man, though he may have outstripped his equals in the race of honour, deems his triumphs incomplete, and his acquisitions imperfect, till he shall have arrived at the same eminence as that which his superiors now boast. That this is matter of fact, and not the mere effusion of idle declamation, is evident from daily experience, and clear, beyond the shadow of doubt, from the records of past ages, and the evidence of our own times. When the lust of empire hath tyrannized over the heart, what has been able to allay it? Conquest has led to conquest; the desolation of one kingdom has only proved an incentive to that of another; and rapid advancements to greatness have only stimulated the mind to the acquisition of new realms, and the propagation of fresh destruction. When also the desire of riches

has

has engrossed the soul, do we ever see this desire satisfied? Does the avaricious man ever meet with that augmentation of his wealth which can enable him to say, I am content? As fire is nourished by the increase of fuel, so is the love of money strengthened and enlarged by the accession of gold. We see men go on piling one heap upon another with unremitted assiduity, swelling their stores by extortion, or adding to their treasures by the niggardly maxims of parsimony. We even behold them in the decline of life, when they tremble under the weight of years, and groan under the maladies of old age; when they are admonished by evidence which they cannot question, that the hour of their dissolution draweth nigh, even at this awful period, we behold them actuated by the desire of accumulation, equally mortified at the least disappointment of their expectations, and equally delighted at the least addition to their revenues. This conduct hath been well compared, by an heathen author, to the folly of a man who increases his store

of provisions as his voyage draws nearer to a conclusion. But is happiness, or tranquillity advanced by this system of rapacious covetousness? Is wealth, which, undoubtedly, from the ardour of the pursuit, promises much, really the source of that good which it holds out to its zealous votaries? If there be labour and trouble in amassing riches, anxiety and care are the inseparable associates of possession. The avaricious man, as he is conscious that all his views have been directed solely to his own emolument, must, from this consciousness, know that he has very little claim to the love or respect of mankind; and if he does receive the outward marks of attachment, he must be certain that assurances of affection result only from the suggestions of private interest; that they are merely the mercenary professions of the lips, and not the sincere emotions of the heart. On this account confidence is a stranger to his breast, and the blessings of pure friendship:—that friendship which enhances the bliss of prosperity, and alleviates the pressure of misfortune,

tune, are utterly unknown to him. He either beholds himself an object of contempt and detestation, or receives the obsequious professions of his attendants; professions, the sincerity of which he cannot but doubt, because he concludes them levelled at his treasures, and made from the expectation of participating his wealth. Nor can a wretch of this stamp enjoy any of the exalted comforts that flow from religion. As it is impossible to serve God and Mammon, his servile attachment to the latter excludes all sense of duty to the former, and consequently renders him destitute of that trust which can alone support him in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment. Such a state surely is far from meriting the title of happiness; for the person placed in it neither enjoys the present with tranquillity, nor can he look to the future without horror. And however we may be disposed to envy the exalted and the opulent, from a supposition that grandeur and wealth are the infallible criterions of happiness, it is evident, from what has been mentioned,

that a man may be very miserable amidst all the boasted distinctions which rank can confer, and all the delights which riches seem able to impart. Two things are requisite to make temporal possessions agents of real good, and promoters of substantial comfort :—a virtuous acquisition and a contented mind. Affluence can be but a trivial blessing to that man who is conscious that it hath been accumulated by the violence of rapine, or the dishonest intrigues of fraud and cunning. It has sometimes happened, that persons who had enriched themselves by injustice, and by means of the power thus acquired were able to defy human opposition, — have been so tortured by their own thoughts, as to have sought for a refuge by putting an end to their own lives. And the man who is not content with the things which he hath, however enviable his condition may appear to others, cannot be happy in himself. While his welfare seems imperfect, he will naturally be induced to endeavour to supply the deficiency, and of course he will be exposed

to

to the distractions which ever attend the eagerness of pursuit. If at one time he be animated by the hope of success, he may, at another, be alarmed by the apprehensions of defeat. And after all, should his attempts succeed, the object gained may finally prove inadequate to his former conceptions of its value, and a poor compensation for the toil which he hath undergone, and the difficulties he hath encountered in the chace of it.

Solomon had in his possession all the means of earthly bliss that the sons of men pursue with such incessant assiduity. If ambition could be gratified, he was master of an extensive empire, and had thousands round him ready to execute his will. If the pleasures of luxury had any charms, he was possessed of boundless wealth, and could command whatever might sooth the refined taste of voluptuous sensuality. He was besides endowed with knowledge superior to that of other mortals, and therefore qualified to ascertain with precision, what

what might most essentially contribute to his felicity. Yet this wise prince, after having tried the power of grandeur, and the luxuries of wealth, says, * “ Better is a “ dry morsel and quietness therewith, than “ an houseful of sacrifices with strife.” And again, “ † Better is a dinner of herbs where “ love is, than a stalled ox and hatred “ therewith.” These are the reflections of the wisest of men; reflections, to the truth of which who can refuse his assent? For what real happiness can exist in that society from which confidence and harmony are banished? The man who associates with those whom he knows by experience to be treacherous and deceitful, because he thinks his interest will be advanced by it, and his wealth increased, merits all the disquietude and uneasiness which he draws upon himself by such an association. A retreat indeed from this perfidious assembly may be attended with a diminution of his revenue; but he gains that, for the loss of which no

* Prov. xvii. 1.

† Prov. xv. 17.

riches

riches can make a satisfactory compensation. Instead of suspicion, he meets with security; he finds peace of mind substituted in the room of vexation and distraction, and real enjoyment in the place of precarious dependence, subject to daily mortification; of course, he also avoids those temptations which may awaken the fury of anger and resentment, and impel him to the violation of the great law of Christian charity.

Such, among many others (for it is impossible to enumerate the multifarious vanity of human pursuits) such are some of the reasons why we ought to repress inordinate desires, and be satisfied with those things that we have. But these are reasons which worldly experience suggests, and which arise from a view of the misery brought upon men by their relinquishing the virtue of moderation, and resigning themselves to the tyranny of ambition or avarice. The apostle mentions a higher motive to contentment; a motive sufficiently strong to influence that mind which has a just sense of religion.

religion. "Be content," he says, "with such things as ye have; for God hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." The light of nature informs us, that there is a Supreme Being, that we are indebted to Him for our existence, and owe every thing we enjoy to the voluntary exertion of his goodness. In addition to our creation and preservation, he hath been graciously pleased, by the gospel of Christ, to unfold the light of immortality, and hath clearly propounded the means by which eternal glory may be obtained. He hath likewise told us, that all things shall work together for good to those that fear him, and that he will never leave nor forsake them who faithfully trust in him. As we cannot doubt the words of unerring truth, so we may be assured that nothing can defeat the purposes of Almighty Power. What then are all the pleasures, the honours, and dignities of this life! what even the empire of the whole world, could it, with all its exalted and enviable privileges be centered in one person, compared with the prospect which

Christianity

Christianity opens to our view ! The possession of the former, be it ever so perfect during the term of its duration, is merely momentary, when weighed against eternity. The absurdity and folly of the sons of men is much aggravated, when, besides the certain knowledge that what we gain cannot be kept long, we every day see proof of the insufficiency of those things to which mankind sacrifice all other considerations, and are convinced, by the strongest evidence, how little they contribute to the establishment of that happiness which they offer to their deluded votaries. We are far from pretending that real poverty is no evil. If it were not, there would be no merit in sustaining the pressure of it ; nor would resignation to the will of God be entitled to any reward. But surely this light affliction, which is but for a moment, may be patiently borne, from a conviction that it will procure for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. How often do earthly parents circumscribe the pleasures of their children, and oblige them to submit

mit to that discipline which seems at the time severe and painful, and even a wanton exertion of authority ! Yet how often, in the subsequent part of their lives, are they bound to bless the hand that corrected them, from a consciousness that if this chastisement had been omitted, they must have been truly wretched ! Can we suppose the discipline of the Most High inflicted for less salutary ends ? and that he who has all the means of good in his hand, will not convert them to the happiness of his creatures ? If we do, we arraign his goodness.—Or, can we imagine that he has instituted laws for the regulation of our conduct, and that he will fail to recompense those who faithfully adhere to them ? If we do, we equally arraign his justice.

In this consideration, therefore, there is enough to make us contented with our present lot. Under the auspices of an human patron, we may be justly alarmed and disquieted : we may conceive him either ignorant of the real state of our necessities, or destitute

destitute of the power to avert them. But he who trusts in the protection of God, reposes confidence where it never was, nor will be, deceived: knowing that he will never leave, nor forsake him, he is not afraid what man can do unto him: though he walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he fears no evil; for he is conscious, that as no place can shroud him from the presence of the Author of his being, so nothing, either in life or death, can exclude him from the operation of his mercy and goodness. That we may be enabled to attain this blessed temper of mind, and rest contented with our present lot, from the hope of future and eternal happiness, may God of his infinite mercy grant, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour!

SERMON

I have been thinking of you very much lately, and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are well and happy. I have been very busy lately, but I have managed to find some time to write to you. I have been thinking of you very much lately, and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are well and happy. I have been very busy lately, but I have managed to find some time to write to you.

SERMON VIII.

PROVERBS, chap. xviii. ver. 14.

*The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity;
but a wounded spirit who can bear?*

A MIDST the infinity of calamities with which every state and condition of human life abounds; a man surely must have lost his senses, if, notwithstanding this strong and incontrovertible evidence of the miseries of the world, he imagines that none of them will touch him, and that his days here will pass away in a serene and undisturbed course of temporal prosperity.

"Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly
 κ "upward;"

“upward;” and whoever wraps himself up in a fanciful security that he shall escape free from those evils which all the rest of his brethren, in some degree or other, are obliged to encounter, of necessity exposeth himself to a double weight of calamity, and aggravates the pressure of every trouble, when it does fall upon him, by the want of a due preparation to sustain it with fortitude and patience. As there is a great variety of conditions in which men are placed here for the trial of their several virtues, there must, of course, arise a proportionable variety of good and evil. Different stations have their different pleasures and enjoyments; they have also their different cares and distractions; from which no one is totally clear. And if the poor and indigent groan under the miseries attendant upon poverty, and are utter strangers to the luxuries and soft enjoyments which wealth procures for its possessors, they are at the same time equally strangers to the numberless disasters which ever accompany the more exalted scenes of life; those perturbations of the mind which
spring

spring from unbounded desire; those distracting cares which, in spite of outward appearances, harass and torment the heart of the wealthy and ambitious man. True wisdom consists in honestly and religiously performing the necessary duties of that state in which Providence hath vouchsafed to place us. Real honour and dignity arise not from a pre-eminence of rank, or a superior abundance of riches:—where the more essential qualities, probity of heart, and a conscientious attachment to the unchangeable laws of virtue and religion are wanting; these, whatever external parade they may appear in, are rather objects to attract our contempt than conciliate our sincere esteem and respect. They may be aptly compared to whited sepulchres; fair and beautiful without, but within full of dead mens bones, and all manner of uncleanness. The person who sensibly feels the claims of religion and morality; who endeavours, as far as the insufficiency of human nature will permit, to perform those offices which his duty towards God and to-

wards man require from him, such a person will in all probability gain the esteem of his brethren; he will most assuredly acquire that which is of far higher importance,—the approbation of his own conscience, and the animating assurance that his virtuous labours will be accepted at the throne of grace, and meet with their due reward at the tribunal of his Redeemer. Should misfortunes come upon him (for virtue is not always accompanied by temporal happiness) the envious, the malicious, in short, sinners of every denomination, whose whole good is bounded within the circle of private interest, are ever ready to counteract the endeavours of the honest part of mankind, as incompatible with their own prosperity; but should misfortunes fall upon him from these causes; should his perseverance in the line of his duty be thwarted by the opposition of selfish and designing men, and, instead of crowning him with honour and happiness, involve him in disgrace and affliction, as he is acquitted by the testimony of his own conscience,

ence, and finds nothing from within to reproach his conduct and convict him of any material deviation from his duty, he will from hence be enabled to bear up firmly against the evil, let it be ever so heavy. Conscious innocence is a shield, against which the shafts of adversity may come, but cannot make any deep impression. How forcibly is this truth exemplified in the history of Job ! Notwithstanding the severe and complicated miseries under which he laboured, he stood firm against all the attacks of Satan. Though reduced from the highest affluence to the most abject poverty ; from being the happy father of a numerous family, cut off from these domestic comforts by casualties as dreadful as they were unexpected ; his body at the same time tormented with all the pangs which disease and sickness could expose it to, in the midst of this unparalleled distress, he is supported by conscious innocence. His integrity, of which he makes so solemn a protestation in the thirty-first chapter, is to him a never-failing source

of comfort, and an inexhaustible treasure of strength. Even the terrors of death, at the very time when he thought himself on the point of falling a victim to it, could not subvert the fortitude of his soul, nor shake the foundation on which his better hopes were so firmly established. This was a particular case. The complicated trials which Job underwent, were designed as a proof to the world how great and excellent the virtues of patience and resignation to the will of God are: that they can, by their unconquerable influence, mitigate the pressure of the severest misery, and keep the soul undismayed in the midst of the direst afflictions which adverse fortune can torture it with.

It is hardly probable that any of us, whatever we may suffer from the rigour of adversity, should labour under such a complication of calamities, as this righteous man did. But let them be ever so oppressive, ever so numerous, what was his refuge and support may be equally ours: let

let our conduct in the day of prosperity be such as his was ; though the scene should change, and trouble beset us on every side, the same patience will enable us to bear up against the storm ; the same hope will animate our breasts, and finally triumph over all opposition. Such are the powers of conscious innocence, and such the fortitude which flows from the inward testimony of integrity. Let us now reverse the circumstances of the case, and see how the matter will stand upon that supposition. We have hitherto spoken of a man surrounded by misfortunes, but endued with the ability of surmounting them, by a knowledge of his own piety, and a firm confidence in the justice and mercy of Heaven. We are now to treat of him who is destitute of these resources ; who, instead of alleviating his troubles by communing with his own heart when he examines himself, finds nothing in his examination which does not reproach him with guilt. How miserable, how insupportable must the anguish of mind be in such a one ! As well may we expect that

the waves of the sea will be still when the storm rages, as that the internal state of such a one can be calm and composed. " The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity ; " but a wounded spirit who can bear ? " Let the person who groans under the burthen of conscious wickedness be, if you please, in a most elevated station of life ; let him be surrounded by multitudes, whose sole business it is to minister to his pleasure ; let the sounds of mirth and festivity be ever heard in his dwelling ; in short, let him be possessed of every thing which can, according to the estimation of the world, conciliate earthly good ; these things, great and pleasing as they appear in outward form, and capable as they seem of satisfying every wish, and fully gratifying every desire of the heart, are generally found deficient when the conscience is wounded by the remembrance of heinous offences, scenes of pleasure, the incense of flattery, the pomp and magnificent parade of temporal dignity, the various enjoyments which riches procure, are poor and unsatisfactory sources

sources of comfort to him whose mind is embittered by the torments of conscious guilt: there is a worm within which poisons all his delights, and renders all the enjoyments which solicit him from without, incapable of bestowing real happiness. What pleasure, what inward tranquillity can that man have in the possession of wealth, whose conscience tells him that it was acquired by rapine and dishonesty! That his fortune was raised by a violation of the laws of Heaven, and an uniform contempt of all the duties of brotherly love and Christian charity! that he owes his present greatness to the ruin of the innocent! to crimes far superior in essential guilt to those for which numbers daily suffer an ignominious death! What satisfaction can such a man receive from riches, tortured by the reflection of the infamous means through which they were amassed together! He may indeed find temporary relief in scenes of riot and dissipation; a round of amusements, licentious company, and intemperate pleasures, may at times obliterate the

the impression of conscience, and silence the terrors of guilt ; yet, in spite of all his endeavours, he cannot for ever fly from himself ; a sense of iniquity will obtrude itself on his private hours, and whenever he retires from the world, his retirement will awaken the anguish and torments of self-condemnation ; nor will even festivity and mirth always avail.

Belshazzar, in the midst of his impious feast, seated on his throne, and surrounded by every thing which could sooth the voluptuous mind, felt horror shake his troubled breast. When the dread hand-writing appeared on the wall, neither the shouts of adulating thousands, nor the highest enjoyments of luxury, could minister the least comfort. His countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosened, and his knees smote one against another. What this hand-writing was to him, conscience is to every one who is inwardly tortured by the remembrance of past enormities.

Nothing

Nothing can be a greater proof of the power of conscience, than that many persons, unable to bear its weight, have made voluntary confession of secret crimes, and rather chose to give themselves up to certain death, than live a continual prey to the horrors of their own thoughts. How many also, though their wealth, unjustly and dishonestly as it had been acquired, had set them above punishment here, and bid defiance to the power of any earthly court of judicature, have nevertheless been unable to enjoy this state of security. Conscience is a judge, whose awful sentence cannot be counteracted, whose solemn voice cannot be silenced, and whose scrutinizing enquiries cannot be evaded by any arts of subtlety. Her appeals will be heard, in spite of all the endeavours which the criminal may exert to fly from her tribunal; and the existence of that man in whose breast her terrors are fixed, cannot but be an intolerable burthen; so intolerable indeed hath it sometimes been, that persons oppressed with it have put an end to their lives with their own hands, rather than endure its galling weight.

We

We may surely then say, with the greatest justice, "a wounded spirit who can bear?" But the most terrible point of view in which we can possibly place the horrors of conscience, is at the sensible approach of death. If a man, even when he is endowed with health and bodily strength, when in the secure possession of every thing which constitutes happiness in this world; if a man, even in these easy circumstances, cannot support the anguish of a wounded spirit, how much aggravated must this anguish be, when he is informed by evidence which he cannot question, that the moment is at hand in which all the things which gave him so much delight, will be snatched from him for ever! Looking backward to the course of his past life, he beholds a series of actions repugnant to the principles of every law of morality, and equally repugnant to the express commands of Heaven:—looking forward, beyond the grave, he is led to consider the decisions of that day when a just and righteous God will denounce vengeance upon those who have spurned his
holy

holy ordinances, and violated the ties of
 charity and humanity. It is not in the
 power of words to give an adequate descrip-
 tion of those terrors which must alarm and
 harrafs the soul of the sinner at that trying
 crisis. What can he then do to avert or
 alleviate the punishment which hangs over
 him? His soul is required of him. An
 humble confession of his crimes, and pious
 resolutions of amendment, should life be
 prolonged, are the only means left to sup-
 plicate the mercy of his offended God. And
 though it be unbecoming presumption in
 man to affirm how far a death-bed repent-
 ance may operate, as the real sincerity of
 it can only be known to that Being who
 trieth the very heart, and from whom no
 secrets are hid, it can still be a very slight
 alleviation of the misery of him who is
 thoroughly conscious that he deserves the
 utmost rigour of divine indignation: And
 it is surely, at best, a very unsubstantial ac-
 knowledgment of the vanities of the world,
 to exclaim against them when we are at
 the point of being cut off from the enjoy-
 ment

ment of them for ever. To repent then of the iniquity into which they have betrayed us, may, justly, be rather imputed to the operation of fear and the dread of future punishment, than to a firm conviction of the heinousness of our guilt and contrite sorrow for what we have done. It is the best we can do in those circumstances; and our contrition, if it be truly sincere, may avail hereafter, since we are to be judged at the tribunal of infinite mercy.

We have hitherto treated of the state of the wicked man, upon a supposition that he reaps the harvest of his villany, and enjoys the fruits of it in undisturbed security. It appears, even from this representation of the matter, that his condition is far from being enviable; far, very far from being what it appears to be to the eye of an indifferent spectator. Conscience is a perpetual source of inquietude and distraction to his mind; and while, in outward appearance, he seems perfectly happy, he is in his secret retirements a prey to anxiety and horror.

horror. Now, should the misfortunes of life fall upon him ; should his wealth be taken from him, should his power and influence in the community be abridged ; should his name, once honoured and respected, become a term of reproach and contempt among his brethren ; should these, or any other casualties incident to the lot of mortals be his portion, how will he, who could not even sustain the terrors of a wounded spirit, be able to bear this reverse of fortune !—to have the consciousness of guilt a torture to him, on the one hand, and the loss of those things, on the other, for whose acquisition he hesitated not to violate every precept of morality, and every dictate of religion ! *

Here the storm falls where there is no preparation to bear it ; the weight is laid where there is no foundation to support it ; the assault is made from without, and within there is nothing to resist it. This is ever the case when the judgments of God fall upon a wicked person ; when the provi-

* Clarke's Sermons, Sermon X, vol. xiv. Duodecimo Edition,

dence of God smites him from without, and his own conscience torments him from within; when that which should be his only comfort and support in the day of trouble, proves itself the greatest and most insupportable part of his calamity, this is indeed a truly miserable case, and can be exceeded by nothing but that whereof it is a part and a forerunner,—even the stings of that worm which never dieth. In all other cases, “the spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity;” but when the spirit itself is thus wounded, who can bear it? When David, awed by the words of the prophet, was made conscious how great a criminal he had been, he is most deeply wounded by a sense of his grievous transgressions. Afterwards, when he was driven from his kingdom by rebellion, and obliged to seek refuge in obscure and solitary retreats, his spirit, undaunted in the midst of this distress, bears it all with patience and resignation. Armed from within by confidence in God,
and

and a firm reliance on his almighty power, he supports himself against all evils which assail him from without. Though his soul was disquieted within him, he penitentially says, Hope thou still in God, for I will yet trust in him, who is the health of my countenance and my God. When Peter, after having thrice denied his Lord and Master, was admonished of his guilt by the evidence which Christ had before mentioned, he went out, and wept bitterly: But afterwards, when, in defence of the evangelical ministry, he was exposed to all the evils which malice and bigotry could suggest, or the vindictive arm of authority inflict, he stood firm in the severe trial of his faith. Conscious integrity was his defence, and supported him against all the attempts made to shake it; nor could the terrors of death itself alienate his soul from the principles which he had adopted.— When Paul, in the presence of Felix, spoke of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, the governor of Judea trembled.

L

But

But from whence did the apostle derive so much weight and authority as to be able to intimidate Felix, even on the judgment seat? He was deprived of every thing which, in human estimation, could command such deference to his words. Whence then proceeded this wonderful effect of his eloquence? Felix had been guilty of violating the laws of equity, by rapine and extortion in his government, for which conduct he was afterwards removed by the Roman Emperor; he had also been notoriously guilty of a breach of chastity, by seducing and marrying the wife of another. The apostle therefore, having eloquently displayed the characters of righteousness and temperance, concluded with a solemn representation of the future judgment, when the violation of these virtues would meet with their merited reward at the tribunal of unerring justice. The governor of Judea, great and powerful as he was, sunk under the forcible language of truth. His soul was conscious that he
had

had offended in these eminent points, and could not sustain itself against the apprehensions of the dreadful punishment entailed upon such enormous criminality. Can there be a stronger argument in favour of the position in the text than this? A man, arrayed in power and authority, trembling at the words of his prisoner, and intimidated by the awful denunciation of one whom the breath of his mouth could have consigned to immediate death!

It would be an endless task to cite all the instances which may be produced from scripture on this subject; nay, every history will furnish us with examples. I will content myself by mentioning one from our own, with which few of you, I believe, are unacquainted. It is of that celebrated priest and statesman who, after having governed both his king and country just as his own interest and passions impelled him, suddenly fell from the height of

power, was dispossessed of his accumulated wealth, and became the ridicule of those very persons whom, in the hour of his exalted fortune, he had insolently trampled upon. But mark his reflections in the season of adversity; hear him, in the bitter anguish of his soul, complain, not that his ample possessions were gone, not that he had lost the favour of his sovereign, nor that his enemies had triumphed over him,—but that he was destitute of the approbation of his own conscience. Had I, says he, but served my God with half the zeal that I have served my king, he would not have left me defenceless. Were all well within, the storms and tempests which now assault me from without, would be vain and ineffectual. — Let all those who burn with the insatiable love of the vanities of the world contemplate these things! Let them strip them of the splendid trappings with which they are decorated, and view them in their genuine colours! If ye are urged by the impulse
of

of ambition, to acquire rank and superiority, let it not gain such prevalence over your better affections, as to induce you to sacrifice your duty as Christians at the altar of earthly dignities! Be assured, that any honour which you can obtain by fraud and dishonesty, will never answer your eager expectations; it may indeed raise you in the eyes of the world, and give you external consequence; but it will for ever sink you in your own esteem; and every moment the means by which you procured it present themselves to your thoughts, the agitation of your mind will be, as it were, an age of disquietude to you. If, when you see the pleasures and amusements which riches procure for their possessors, you should feel yourselves agitated by the desire of the same, consider what the consequences may be, should you place yourselves in the same condition by trespassing on the rights of humanity, and the injunctions of religion! Let it be supposed, that you gain your

end, without detection of the dishonesty which you have unfeelingly exerted in the prosecution of it, still you cannot conceal this from yourself; conscience is a monitor which will often alarm you with your guilt; and the nearer you draw towards the grave, the stronger and more dreadful will her voice be; she will tell you that, although you have escaped here, there is a trial you must undergo, far more terrible than any here, before a Judge whose knowledge cannot be deceived, and whose justice cannot be evaded. To reverse these terrors, we have nothing to do but to act up to our duty as men and Christians. If we faithfully perform that which is required of us, we shall be endued with fortitude from above to undergo any afflictions which it may please Heaven, in its infinite wisdom, to oppress us with. A consciousness that we have endeavoured, according to our best abilities, to fulfil our respective obligations, will ensure to us that peace which passeth all understanding; that peace which

(151)

which the world, with all its treasures, cannot give to the wounded breast; and which the world, with all its power, cannot take away from him whose own conscience acquits and absolves him.

(101)

which the world with all its
cannot give to the wounded heart; and
which the world with all its power can-
not take away from him whose con-
science is pure and true.

BERNARD

SERMON IX.

ST. PETER, chap. iii. ver. 12 and 13.

*For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous,
and his ears are open unto their prayers; but
the face of the Lord is against them that do
evil.*

*And who is he that will harm you, if ye be
followers of that which is good?*

IF we take into consideration the necessity
of a Supreme Being, and find ourselves,
upon mature and serious reflection, impelled
to acknowledge that there is a Deity who
created the world, and all that therein is,
we must of necessity, at that same time,
conclude, that this Power who made all
things

things, is possessed of perfection in the highest degree. If we entertain a supposition that the attributes of God, namely, that his power and knowledge, his goodness and mercy, are circumscribed, we form an idea totally incompatible with that of the Supreme Being. He is, upon such a supposition, divested of those qualities that mark the distinction between finite and infinite, between perfection and imperfection. We cannot, therefore, admit the belief of a God, without annexing to that belief that he is endowed with power and knowledge, with goodness and mercy in the most extensive sense. Nor can we adopt these sentiments, without confessing that he, who in the beginning made the world, still governs it with his pervading influence; that all things, however strange and inexplicable they may appear to the contracted ideas of presumptuous mortals, in the present administration of the world, are, nevertheless, under the controul and governance of an all-wise and an all-powerful Director. Allowing this, and most assuredly we must allow it, or
 confess

confess ourselves atheists, we cannot but conclude that this Almighty Being looks down with his especial favour upon those who are observant of his precepts, and exert their utmost endeavours to walk obediently in those ways which he hath vouchsafed to enjoin them.

We cannot but conclude that his wrath and indignation will, on the other hand, be poured down upon those disobedient subjects who revolt from his laws, who violate those statutes which he hath imposed, and the observance of which he hath constituted to be their essential duty. If the matter be, as it hath been stated, how does it happen in the occurrences of life, that immorality and avowed irreligion triumph in the accomplishment of their iniquitous projects? Whence is it that men, who have openly violated every social duty, and derided the sacred ordinances instituted by Heaven, whence is it that they, notwithstanding this impious conduct, revel at large in wealth, pleasure, dignity, and

and in the full possession of every thing that in human estimation constitutes the ingredients of temporal happiness? How comes it to pass, that while the wicked live in this great prosperity, and flourish, as the Psalmist says, like a green bay-tree, in perpetual verdure, the just and righteous are frequently seen groaning under the pressure of calamities, oppressed by poverty, or exposed to the tyranny of unrelenting persecutors? If there be a God, how is such an unequal distribution of comfort and misery consistent with his supreme attributes? If his knowledge be infinite and unbounded, he cannot but know that such a dispensation obtains in the world; and if his power be uncircumscribed, he cannot but be possessed of ability to minister redress; to cast down the evil and presumptuous from their exalted seats, and elevate the just and the humble. The apostle says, "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.—And who is
" he

“ he that will harm you, if ye be followers.
 “ of that which is good ? ” — Any one who takes but a superficial view of the arrangement of human affairs, may perhaps be led to conclude that the words of St. Peter are irreconcilable with the true state of things in this life : that if God takes no cognizance of the crimes and virtues of men, by punishing the former and rewarding the latter, such declarations are incompatible with the plain matter of fact ; as no one can doubt a moment, if he looks into the world, that the wicked frequently succeed to the utmost of their sensual wishes, and that the righteous frequently fail in their attempts to obtain a much more honest and a much less advantageous situation. But whoever does adopt this opinion ; whoever does, from a consideration of good and evil, as they are dispensed in this state of probation, believe that the Most High is indifferent to the interests of virtue, and establishes no distinction between works of godliness and those of impiety, — such a one builds his arguments upon false premises,
 and

and draws conclusions not less erroneous than they are derogatory to the power, the goodness, the mercy of God, and, in short, every superior attribute of excellence which we can ascribe to the Almighty Ruler of the universe. The Deity, when he vouchsafed to call the world from the womb of darkness and confusion, and to give to man the possession of it, and the power over every thing created, at the same time assigned him immortal happiness in Eden, provided he paid due obedience to certain laws. These laws were violated. In consequence of this violation, our first parents were expelled from Paradise, and their race ever after doomed to labour, affliction, and mortality. Yet, in the very denunciation of this righteous punishment, Heavenly mercy interposed, and gave an intimation of man's future victory over the grand seducer. In succeeding ages, God left not mankind ignorant of what was their indispensable duty; and ratified his ordinances by the incontrovertible evidence of almighty power. Afterwards, in the fulness
of

of time, he vouchsafed to send his only Son, that he might be a propitiation for the sins of the world ; that he might remove every doubt from the mind, dispel all the gloom which had hitherto perplexed the Gentile nations, and place the certainty of a future state and its consequent rewards and punishments in the clearest point of view. Now, can any thing be more absurd, more repugnant to the common deductions of reason, than to suppose that the Being who hath deigned, in compassion to the infirmities of men, to inform them clearly of their respective duties, and to animate them to a due discharge of what he requires, by the proffer of incorruptible glory and immortal happiness ; — can any thing be more absurd than to suppose that the Supreme Being, after having graciously done all this, should be so regardless of the conduct of his creatures, as to make no distinction between those who are faithful and obedient subjects, and those who have seized every opportunity of transgressing his precepts for the gratification of their
own

own immoral wishes? Much more absurd will the conclusion be, if we suppose that a distinction does actually obtain in favour of the latter; that is, that while the unseparated servants of their Lord and Master persevere in the strict performance of their duty, they are, even on account of this steady attachment, involved in distress and wretchedness; that, on the contrary, they who discard every idea of allegiance, who disavow all the humble claims of the poor and needy, and trample with insolence upon whatever religion enjoins, are frequently the favourites of fortune, and have at their command every thing which can soothe the overbearing arrogance of pride, and gratify the licentious desires of voluptuousness.—To prevent you from adopting, from even harbouring such sentiments as these, sentiments totally repugnant to all notions which we can rationally entertain of the Deity, I will endeavour to clear up the matter, by shewing you the mistaken opinions of man, and by evincing the most consummate wisdom of God in his present dispensation.

dispensation.—With regard to the real condition of those persons whom the world is disposed to esteem happy, and even to envy, on account of the accumulation of prosperity which they seem to enjoy, and also touching those who are in general looked upon as miserable in the highest degree,—in both cases the public estimation may be totally wrong, or at least very erroneous: in consequence, the argument will not hold good. Are things always in their essential qualities, exactly what they appear to the eye of the observer? Is a splendid outside the sure criterion and the infallible attestation of real peace of mind within? Because a man hath the pre-eminence over those around him in honours and dignities, does it follow of course that he is equally pre-eminent in inward tranquillity? We all know that a sepulchre, however fair and beautiful it may appear outwardly, is within full of impurity and uncleanness.—As true happiness and really substantial content arise solely from the serious reflections of the mind, it is absurd for us to

M

conclude

conclude that any one is supremely happy, unless we can thoroughly search into his secret thoughts, and by such an investigation be satisfied that there is no deception in the outward appearance. There are several passions implanted by nature in the human breast, which have power sufficient to embitter the days of the most exalted mortal, and render the splendid seats of the most opulent the residence of care, trouble, and disquietude. — Envy, pride, ambition, ill-nature, and the long train of the other passions to which we are in every station obnoxious, are uneasy and painful associates;—nay, any one of these, if it obtains an undue influence, and subjects us to its tyrannical government, is enough to counteract every attempt in the pursuit of happiness; is able to render us completely miserable, in the strongest sense of the word, though at the same time fortune shall have uniformly co-operated with our wishes, and showered down temporal blessings on our heads. Saul, after the defeat of the Philistines, could not have been looked upon

upon by his subjects in any other light than that of a happy prince, on account of such signal success. Yet this very victory (acceptable and glorious as it was to his people) though perhaps it constituted the safety of his kingdom, this very triumph proved a source of uneasiness and mortification to him. He was stung with envy, and could not bear the acclamations and praises which were publicly bestowed upon David, though to his conduct alone the success was justly to be ascribed. “* Saul was very wroth, and the slaying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands; and what can he have more but the kingdom?”—Here we see how far any passion, unrestrained in its licentious violence, may extend its operations. Saul, even from envy of the virtues of an inferior; of a man who had led his armies to victory, and returned back in

* 1 Samuel, chap. xviii. ver. 8.

triumph, feels his mind, from that very circumstance, for ever dispossessed of tranquillity: and to this were owing all the subsequent calamities which befel that unhappy and infatuated prince.—Haman also, though in the possession of all the honours and dignities which the profuse liberality of an indulgent and powerful monarch could bestow, was destitute of peace of mind, because Mordecai still sat at the king's gate. The destruction however which he had destined for his poor (and, as he thought, destitute and unfriended) victim was turned upon himself; and he suffered upon the very spot which he had assigned for the execution of the other.—What do these examples of divine justice teach us? Most assuredly, that the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. Since from hence it appears, that the happiness of the wicked is not always essentially what it appears to be, it is equally as true that the adversity of the righteous is not always so deplorable and so severe as it is judged to be

be from visible circumstances. If poverty and distress be the temporal portion of a good man, he is able to bear the burthen patiently, from a consciousness that what he suffers does not originate from his own profligacy and misconduct. The reflections arising from this consciousness may surely have power to blunt the edge of common calamities, and diffuse peace and tranquillity over his soul. The effect will appear in resignation, in a pious submission to the will of that Being who orders every thing here according to the decisions of consummate wisdom, and will hereafter justify them by the open decrees of perfect equity. And undoubtedly that man can hardly be pronounced unhappy, who trusts in the mercy of his Almighty Creator; who perseveres, in spite of all opposition from without, in the line of his duty, and looks forward to a future state with the animating hope of there receiving a glorious and perfect compensation for all the evils which he undergoes here. The Holy Scriptures,

meant to make us wise unto salvation, propose to us, as examples worthy of our closest imitation, the lives of just and righteous men. But are these persons always arrayed in the splendid trappings of earthly prosperity? Are they described to us as uniformly possessed of wealth, rank, and dignity above others? The very reverse is frequently the case. They are often shewn groaning under the pressure of accumulated misfortunes, and suffering the sharpest extremities of temporal wretchedness. Their souls are filled with the scornful reproof of the wealthy, and the despitefulness of the proud. They are abridged of all the conveniences of life, and cut off from all the blessings of society: yet these very men are represented by the word of God, as the peculiar favourites of Heaven. Undoubtedly then the Supreme Being vouchsafed to impart to them an adequate supply of his divine grace in this world, and will in the next receive them into the kingdom of his incorruptible glory. Though the apostle
says,

says, " the eyes of the Lord are over the
 " righteous, and his ears are open unto
 " their prayers ; but the face of the Lord is
 " against them that do evil," he certainly
 does not mean either that the lives of the
 former were of course to pass in an unin-
 terrupted current of ease, or that the latter,
 in consequence of their avowed immorality
 and irreligion, would be perpetually har-
 rassed by temporal calamities ; for he adds,
 " if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy
 " are ye : and be not afraid of their terror,
 " neither be troubled." — The immediate
 delegates of our blessed Redeemer were
 exposed to the most severe trials of their
 faith ; their mission was to oppose the root-
 ed prejudices of a dissolute world, a world,
 on the one side (namely that of the Jews)
 observant of the ceremonies, but neglectful
 of the weightier matters of the law, pre-
 possessed by a firm opinion that their Messiah
 would be a powerful victorious prince, and
 elevate them in triumph over their van-
 quished enemies : a world, on the other
 side,

fide (that of the Gentiles) overwhelmed with idolatry, and slaves to superstition, yet armed with sovereign power and authority. The apostles, however, unterrified by this formidable appearance of opposition, entered cheerfully upon their sacred ministry, encountered with invincible fortitude every difficulty, and even laid down their lives in vindication of the faith which they had adopted. In their utmost distress, they would have rejected the offer of life, though it had been accompanied with all the luxuries, and dignified with all the privileges which power, wealth, and rank could bestow. They were convinced that God, the Almighty Ruler of the universe, heard their prayers, and would at his own appointed time redress their grievances by a reward, counterbalancing all the miseries they had sustained :—the reward of immortal happiness,

Let us not then with our contracted ideas, with our inability to comprehend the dispensations of Eternal Wisdom, arraign the
the

the methods of his providence ! God hath placed us here in a state of probation, hath clearly informed us what he requires from us in all situations, and declared, that by our obedience to his laws we shall be happy for ever.— If, in our passage through this chequered state of existence, it be our lot to experience the calamities of poverty and distress, let us remember that our sufferings cannot but be short ; that all the evils of life are to be submitted to with patience, because they are the distribution of perfect wisdom ; and that they who act obediently to the word of God, will finally receive a satisfactory reward.—Why do men in this life willingly encounter difficulties and hardships ? Why do they (as is frequently the case) abandon ease at home, and voluntarily expose themselves to the perils of the ocean and all the disasters of unwholesome climates ? That they may acquire riches, and, at their return, pass the

the remainder of their days in pomp and splendor.

If these laborious exertions are made; if these dangers, dreadful and unavoidable as they are, are braved for the acquisition of temporal benefits, how much more incumbent is it for us to labour in the pursuit of that reward which religion offers to the virtuous endeavours of men! The value of the latter is infinitely superior to that of the former; true wisdom therefore requires an exertion on our side, adequate to this infinite difference. — Fully persuaded of this, let us act in that manner which such a persuasion reasonably demands; and if in the prosecution of our honest and virtuous purposes, either adverse fortune or the efforts of the wicked thwart our wishes and involve us in worldly misfortunes, let us never relinquish our dependence upon God; let us look to the final event, and remember that every seeming irregularity will at the last day be

(171)

be cleared up, and the dispensations of Divine Providence satisfactorily vindicated before the assembled universe; "for the poor shall not alway be forgotten; the patient abiding of the meek shall not perish for ever."

SERMON

171
The second part of the dissertation
deals with the historical development of
the subject matter. In the
first part, the author discusses the
general principles of the subject, and
in the second part, he discusses the
particular details of the subject.

2017

SERMON X.

ECCLESIASTES, chap. xii. ver. 7.

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

DEATH hath been styled, of all dreadful things, the most dreadful. When men consider the troubles and calamities to which this state of our existence is exposed, their minds are but slightly alarmed by the general survey of human misery. They look upon many evils as the local scourges of particular regions, and many as confined to particular departments of life. Such, therefore, though they may excite sentiments

ments of compassion towards the unhappy sufferers, little disquiet those who know that they are placed out of the sphere of their baneful influence; and, even touching those disasters which may probably be their lot, they flatter themselves that they shall be able either to elude them by skill and address, or surmount them by activity and fortitude. Health, they imagine, may be secured and perpetuated by temperance and exercise. The pressure of poverty may be alleviated by the diligent exertions of the body, or the prudent meditations of the mind; and the difficulties which competition or hostility shall throw in their way, may be vanquished by the strenuous efforts of manly perseverance. These are the flattering chances that animate and nourish hope in our progress through the precarious circumstances of this world: but death is what no one hath hitherto escaped, nor is any one so absurd as to conceive that he shall be distinguished by an exemption from the common lot: and if we had no other light than the faint glimmering of natural reason

reason to assist and console our minds in the contemplation of mortality, dreary at least, if not insupportably painful would our reflections be, whenever we turned our thoughts towards this certain termination of all our prospects here; this fatal doom, which neither power nor wealth can arrest or even retard. It is indeed true, that some of the wiser heathens embraced the belief of a future state, as the only satisfactory refuge against the evils of life and the terrors of death; yet still, in spite of all arguments upon the subject, their deductions at last amounted to nothing more than probability. They candidly acknowledged that their opinion might be erroneous, though they willingly cherished it, because they were conscious of its present benefits, and certain that, if it should prove a mere delusion, they could sustain no injury after death by the adoption of it here. But if even the reasoning of these enlightened philosophers was thus uncertain and inconclusive, what must have been the condition of the illiterate multitude! They
were

were unable to enter into similar disquisitions; of course they were destitute of those resources that resulted from profound meditation; they had nothing to oppose against the evils that threatened them, except that sullen courage which resulted from despair, or that which was courage only in appearance, because it sprung not from a magnanimous and deliberate contempt of danger, but from ignorance of the real calamities into which they were about to be precipitated.

Man, it must be confessed, being distinguished by the endowments of reason, is superior to the brute part of the creation; yet if you abridge him of the privileges of immortality, and confine all his hopes and expectations to the contracted theatre of this world, what will be the consequence? The very quality by which he claims pre-eminence, becomes a source of the bitterest anguish. That reason, by which his mind adverts to the future, points out the certainty of death, and tortures him

tures him with those gloomy apprehensions, from which the irrational animal is free, by the very want of this distinguishing faculty.

In order to place this matter in the clearest point of view, let us contemplate man as happy or unhappy in this world, and judge of his condition, touching that death to which he must submit. Let us consider what reflections may be supposed to arise at the hour of his departure, from a previous disbelief of a future state.

“ O death (says the son of Sirach) how
 “ bitter is the remembrance of thee to
 “ a man that liveth at rest in his posses-
 “ sions; unto the man that hath nothing
 “ to vex him, and that hath prosperity in
 “ all things!” These words are particularly
 true of him who hath sacrificed every
 superior claim to worldly good, if, at the
 same time, we suppose him to be actuated
 by the belief of a future state. In this case,
 death appears as the eternal separation from

all he holds dear and valuable, and the passage to a state of retribution, at the tribunal of a just and Almighty God. Severe, then, must his sorrow and anguish be ! Sorrow, on the one hand, for the deprivation of good that can never be regained, and anguish, on the other, from the dread of punishment, which cannot be evaded. But if he either disbelieves, or discards all thoughts of a future resurrection, he will, it is true, be freed from the latter of these terrors. Still there is nothing left to alleviate the bitterness of death, with regard to those possessions, from which he is on the point of being torn for ever. He is now called upon to bid an everlasting adieu to all the pleasures and delights which have for years formed the fabric of his happiness : and nothing remains to be substituted in their room, except insensibility and oblivion. The soul of man, surely, is of too refined, too spiritual a nature, to look forward to such a gloomy annihilation of all its active qualities without horror or dismay.

It

It may be here said, that although the remembrance of death is thus bitter to him who hath revelled in the enjoyments of the world, it must be a source of joy, of rapture, and consolation to him who hath travelled through life in poverty and distress. That it is such to the man who contemplates the termination of his sufferings in this, as the dawn of incorruptible happiness and glory in another state, we readily allow. But remove this animating prospect from the view, let the grave be considered as the extreme boundary of all his hopes, what will his reflections then be? The evils, indeed, which he has sustained in his sharp conflicts with the storms of adversity, are now drawing to a period. He is entering into that silent Heaven “ * where the
 “ wicked cease from troubling, and where
 “ the weary be at rest; where the prisoners rest together, and hear not the voice
 “ of the oppressor.” Yet, though his departure from this world is the conclusion of

* Job, chap. iii. ver. 17 and 18.

sorrow and misery, he cannot embrace it as any real compensation for what he has encountered in his wretched pilgrimage upon earth. He must consider it merely as a negative blessing; as absence from pain, not the admission to positive happiness. Let him, then, reflect upon the complicated calamities under which he has laboured, undeservedly laboured. He may, perhaps, have experienced the perfidy of friends, and been pierced by those arrows which, in the hour of credulous confidence, he fondly thought would have been turned only against his enemies. He may have exerted his most strenuous efforts in the line of his duty, yet have uniformly found all his honest endeavours thwarted by the hostile agency of causes which it was impossible for him to counteract; and, amidst the miseries of his own indigence and humiliation, he may have seen others, by the stratagems of fraud, by the daring exertions of violence, or a fortunate concurrence of events, advanced to posts of honour and wealth.

These,

These, and many other calamities, too obvious to require a particular enumeration, are such as perpetually occur. The past days, therefore, exhibit a black detail of misfortunes; a melancholy scene of ineffectual struggles against poverty, and fruitless attempts to secure temporal blessings. The prospect before him is dark and dreary, incapable of imparting any comfort, save that which he anticipates from the cessation of pain, by the extinction of all sense and feeling.

Such is the remembrance of death to those who have nothing to hope or fear beyond the grave. And, were this life destined to be the whole of our existence, we might justly arraign the goodness of God in our creation. The boasted privileges of reason might be termed, instead of enviable, disastrous accomplishments, — since they would, in this case, embitter the bliss of prosperity, by reminding us of the precarious short tenure of our enjoyments, and condense the shades of adversity, by inform-

ing us that no redress will ever be given to those who have been the undeserving victims of temporal misfortunes.

Though it has been doubted, whether there ever was a deliberate Atheist, yet it is unhappily very common for men to order their actions as if they did actually renounce the belief of a God. In the same manner, though no person will dare to affirm that he shall never die, yet multitudes act as if they thought themselves everlasting residents upon earth, and amenable to no future tribunal. Were a being of another order to survey the actions of men, and inspect the desires that animate, that impel or controul the human mind, he would hardly imagine us to be but momentary tenants of this spot. When he beheld some, enflamed by ambition, braving every danger, encountering every difficulty, and sacrificing every virtue that adorns our nature, in the search after honour; or when he contemplated others, wrapped up in the accumulation of wealth, and daily denying themselves

selves even the scanty conveniences of life, that they may daily augment their stores, he would never suppose the very existence of these persons to be so precarious, that they cannot ensure it for a single hour. But if the general pursuits of men deserve the imputation of folly, on account of the uncertain tenure of all their acquisitions, how much more absurd must their conduct appear, if we examine the arguments upon which the probability of a future state is grounded. We cannot, indeed, well allow the existence of a Deity, without admitting the necessity of another life. If we believe the former and deny the latter, what must our conceptions be of the Supreme Being! It is impossible, upon this supposition, to acknowledge him to be infinite in goodness and mercy. That there is much evil in the world, every one will readily admit; nor is it in the power of any man always to secure himself from temporal calamities. Our own conduct perhaps may be regulated by the sacred laws of virtue and integrity; but we cannot compel

others to act in reference to the same equitable principles. Consequently, we cannot invariably escape the depredations of violence, or the artifices of fraud; nor can we always avert the distresses of poverty by toil and industry. There are also many natural evils; such as the deprivation or decay of the several senses, sickness and disease in all their manifold forms. These are not distributed among the sons of men in equal portions, nor according to the virtues or vices of the respective sufferers.

It appears from hence, that this world is by no means a state where men are rewarded or punished by the decisions of perfect equity; since the most depraved and the most profligate frequently attain the highest posts of dignity and opulence, while the virtuous are divested of every thing that can confer honour, or procure comfort.

Such is the present condition of mortals; and as the wicked and the righteous are often removed from this scene of tumult
and

and confusion, without any change in their several lots, if death be an eternal sleep, what ideas can we entertain of a Supreme Being ! We cannot contemplate Him as a God of purity, who suffers the triumphs of iniquity to pass off in everlasting impunity. We cannot suppose him to be a God of infinite goodness, who calls his creatures into existence for the mere purpose of consigning their lives to misery and affliction ; neither can he be a lover of justice, who, though invested with almighty power, thus abandons the righteous to the complicated calamities of adversity, without any subsequent compensation for their unmerited sufferings.

The difficulty, nay, the utter impossibility of reconciling the present state of men, upon this supposition, with the attributes of the Deity, induced many of the heathens to adopt the belief of a future state. By this, indeed, every inconsistency may be cleared up, and every seeming irregularity vindicated from the charge of injustice. He that has placed the sons of men in a probationary

tionary state, previous to that of universal retribution, most assuredly knows best which are the proper means of ascertaining the fidelity and attachment of his several subjects; nor ought his goodness or his equity to be questioned, when he suffers his faithful servants to groan under the pressure of evil, because Omnipotence can impart ample redress for all that they endure here.

How often do men, in the pursuit of wealth and honour, undergo the most severe labours with alacrity, from a conviction that success will fully repay all their toil! Much more reason have we to acquiesce in the harsh dispensations of Providence, because the greatest riches and the highest dignities of this life, bear no proportion to the exalted rewards which the Supreme Being can bestow upon those who shall be found worthy of them.

But if the wiser heathens, guided by the light of nature alone, and having no other foundation for their opinion than the deductions

ductions of probable conjecture; if they, notwithstanding, thought themselves bound to adhere to the precepts of virtue, from an expectation of being adequately recompensed in another life, how much more strongly does the obligation bind Christians!—It has pleased Almighty God, in compassion to the forlorn state of a sinful and an ignorant world, to remove the veil that hung upon futurity, and by the blessed ministry of his only begotten Son, to bring life and immortality to light. We are no longer left to the doubtful theories of speculation in this important point, nor are the rewards of eternity depraved by the gross fancies of superstition. Miserable then, but strictly just, will the portion of all those be who, placed within the beneficent sphere of Christian light, exhibit the works of Pagan darkness.

So dreary, indeed, would the condition of man be, if all his hopes and prospects were bounded by the present life, that one
would

would imagine this consideration powerful enough of itself to fix our sentiments. It is not wonderful that, while we are in the vigour of youth and health, we should detach our thoughts from the gloomy idea of death, and shun it as the loathsome intruder upon our happiness; neither is it astonishing that the mind which is absorbed in the prosecution of important plans, should overlook all other future consequences. This temporary forgetfulness of our latter end may be easily accounted for. Some objects appear great, not from their real magnitude, but because they are placed near the spectator's eye; while others, far superior in every article that constitutes importance, are looked upon with indifference or contempt, on account of their distance. But it seems almost impossible that any one should, by serious meditation on the subject, bring his mind to a total disbelief of a future state; that he should renounce the testimony of all ages, stifle the intimations of natural reason, and extinguish

extinguish the suggestions of hope and fear, reject the revelation of Christ, and brave the vengeance of God ! Yet there are men who have arrived at this desperate pitch of wanton depravity ; for no limits can be set to the excursions of wickedness, when it has once obtained absolute empire over the soul. There are men, even in this enlightened age, and in a country that lately claimed pre-eminence in the pure establishment of Christianity, who not only deny a future state, and openly disavow all sense of religion, but endeavour as far as they can, to invalidate and dissolve all its sacred obligations. In the emphatical language of Isaiah, * “ The earth is defiled under the inhabitants thereof ; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, and broken the everlasting covenant.” These infidels seem to be in the same deplorable predicament as the apostate Jews were, of whom St. Paul thus speaks : “ For this cause (namely, because they received not the love of truth, that they might be

* Isaiah, chap. xxiv. ver. 5.

(saved)

saved) “ * God shall send them strong delu-
 sion, that they should believe a lie ; that
 “ they might all be damned who believed
 “ not the truth, but had pleasure in un-
 “ righteousness.”—May the mercy of Hea-
 ven preserve us from the baneful contagion
 of this abandoned system ! — a system of
 ferocity, licentiousness, and irreligion, un-
 paralleled in the rudest ages of antiquity,
 and unknown among the most barbarous
 clans of savages. Men, whose consciences
 are seared by habitual depravity, are some-
 times so far deserted by the grace of God,
 as to become totally insensible both to the
 dictates of reason and the solemn denunci-
 ations of religion ; and they, whose hearts
 are engrossed by sensual, or enflamed by am-
 bitious gratifications, naturally wish to ob-
 literate all moral and religious sentiments in
 others, for the purpose of forming a coalition
 of desperate associates in the prosecution of
 their iniquitous schemes. The nature of
 things, however, is not altered by their pro-
 fligate conduct. Negligence may overlook,
 and obstinacy defy a certain evil, but they

* 2 Thess. chap. ii. ver. 11.

cannot

cannot avert it. The arrangements of divine Providence cannot be suspended or thwarted by the levity or perverseness of men. He that avows his disbelief of a future state, avows an opinion repugnant to the general persuasion of mankind. He disbelieves that which good men have ever embraced with joy and rapture, and from which the wicked have frequently started back with horror and dismay.—If the temporal inequalities that exist in the fortunes of men, and a rational enquiry into the nature and superior endowments of the soul, impel us to believe that there will be a state of impartial retribution hereafter; if this opinion is further corroborated by a mission from God himself, and by a declaration that he will finally judge the world in righteousness, what will he be able to allege in his vindication, when he is summoned before the tribunal of Christ, who hath rejected this accumulated mass of evidence! When his Lord shall demand from him an account of his stewardship, what evasions will palliate his abuse of the gift of reason, this depraved misap-

misapplication of the brightest talent committed to our trust! And how will he appear in the presence of his injured Saviour, “* who hath trodden under foot the
 “ Son of God, and hath counted the blood
 “ of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done
 “ despite unto the spirit of grace!” These reflections, duly weighed and attended to with that calm meditation which so solemn a subject justly requires, cannot but make a deep impress upon our minds.

A wise man, therefore, must at least allow, that a doctrine so strongly supported, which is enforced by the authority both of Heaven and Earth, of God and man, merits his most serious attention: that the question is too important to be discarded with indifference, and too awful to be prejudged by the determined obstinacy of passion or partiality.

The history of mankind proves, that no one hath hitherto escaped death; and daily

* Hebrews, chap. x. ver. 29.

experience

experience certifies, that we can neither tell at what period, nor in what manner, our present existence will be terminated.

Let us then, while it is yet day, seize the opportunity granted by the mercy of God ! Let us not postpone that work, which we confess in our hearts to be of infinite moment, to a future season, when we know not whether our existence will be continued even to the next hour ! Let us seek the Lord, while he may be found ! When the time of our dissolution draweth nigh, we shall be thus prepared to meet death with tranquillity and resignation, animated by the assurance that, although the corruptible body returns to its original dust, the souls of the righteous will be translated to those blessed mansions, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasure for evermore.

[illegible]

211138

SERMON XI.

ECCLESIASTES, chap. iii. ver. 17.

*I said in my heart, God shall judge the righteous
and the wicked; for there is a time there for
every purpose, and for every work.*

OUR beneficent Creator, who hath given us life and being, gave them for the most gracious purposes; that by following his commands, and conforming to those ordinances which he hath instituted, we may render ourselves worthy of his protection here, and be admitted into his unperishable kingdom hereafter. For the promotion of these ends, he hath imparted unto man superiority over all other animals; superiority not derived from the qualities of the body, such as strength, swiftness, or magnitude;

but distinguishable by reason and understanding. These eminent faculties enable us to judge of the things presented to our view, not merely touching their immediate, but their future consequences also: — thus while other animals are intent only upon the objects of the present moment, man is endowed with the power of extending his thoughts to distant concerns, and by previous consideration, is frequently able to avert future calamities.

But all must allow, that no person can be entitled to rewards, unless he has had the freedom given him of choosing good or evil. Was he forced by an irresistible impulse to adopt virtue, he could by no means be deemed worthy of the honours promised to the virtuous. Was he, on the other hand, impelled by force equally irresistible into the paths of iniquity, he could never be a just object of that punishment denounced upon the wicked. In either case, instead of acting from himself, he would be entirely passive; and consequently,

ly, whatever good actions he might perform, or whatever crimes he might perpetrate, as he has no choice, no power of embracing virtue, or rejecting vice freely, he cannot in the first instance be good, nor criminal in the latter.

Upon these principles, to the truth of which every one must subscribe, let us examine the wise man's assertion.

In the present state of worldly dispensations, the righteous are often oppressed by temporal misfortunes, while the wicked abound in every thing that constitutes earthly happiness. Suppose for a moment that this arrangement was entirely reversed, what would, in all probability, be the consequence? If it were impossible to commit any crimes against the laws of morality and religion without instant and adequate vengeance falling on the delinquent's head; if we daily and hourly saw the perpetrators of iniquity, immediately after the commission of the evil, victims to divine indignation,

dignation, who would sin against God? No one surely but a madman. Should a person with his eyes open throw himself down a precipice where his destruction must be inevitable, what would the world say of him? To what other cause would they ascribe such an action but insanity? Equally insane might he be pronounced, who, although he uniformly beholds instantaneous vengeance fall upon the transgressor, yet despises the inevitable consequences, and rushes headlong into the very same perdition by the perpetration of the very same crimes.

If Providence did adopt this method, and did thus invariably interfere in the management of the world, there would be an end of almost all the Christian virtues; there would be no room for the exercise of patience and resignation; nor could we display any proof of real submission to the will of God: we might indeed apparently adhere to the statutes of Heaven, and testify our observance of the ordinances which the Almighty

Almighty hath enjoined; but attachment to our Creator would not in this case result from the principle of love or duty;—it would be the extorted effect of fear and terror;—it would no more be deserving of approbation and reward, than a man who, desirous and willing to murder another, is alone restrained from the open attempt by the apprehension of legal punishment.

From this short investigation of the subject, we may clearly see how necessary it is that God should not always visibly display the judgments of retribution in the kingdom of men; because this state is nothing more than a state of trial and probation preparatory to our entrance into a more lasting one.

Good and evil, life and death, are set before us by the Sovereign Author of our being, and submitted to our free choice; we are invested with the powers of reason to direct us in our election; and when we have violated the ordinances of virtue or religion,

religion, we have a monitor within to call us back to the path of our duty. God hath even done more ; — he hath graciously vouchsafed to reveal his will to us, which, if we adopt it for our guide, will infallibly lead us into all truth, and finally conduct our steps to the mansions of peace and everlasting rest : but he hath not bound us in the chains of resistless necessity, in order that our faith and reliance upon his promises may be freely exercised ; for it is this freedom alone which can make us responsible before his tribunal ; that is, save or condemn us ; admit us to the participation of the promised blessings, or render us obnoxious to his wrath and vengeance.

Many wise heathens were induced to believe a future state, from the unequal and apparently inequitable distribution of good and evil in this life. On one side, they saw the virtuous distressed, beset with calamities, and groaning under the pressure of every misfortune that adversity brings in its train. On the other, they beheld immor-

tality

talities and irreligion triumphant ; the wicked filling the highest posts of honour, dignity, and wealth ; while all things around them conspired together to make their lives easy, and to promote their interest and happiness : they saw the just and the wicked quit this state of existence, in which their respective lots had been so very different, without any avowal of the innocence of the one, or any punishment of the criminality of the other ; and as they were led by all their enquiries into the volume of nature, to admit the being of an Almighty God, they thought it incompatible with his justice that these irregularities in the system of his government should never be rectified, that the crooked should never be made straight, nor the rough places plain. They therefore concluded, that as redress was not always obtained here, the matter would be fully cleared up hereafter ; and that all the dispensations which appeared so defective in this life, would be satisfactorily vindicated in another.

Hence

Hence originated their expectations of future rewards and punishments; and though their ideas relative to this point, being the mere deductions of natural reason, may appear to us as fables, of which we disavow the belief, they suggest at least a strong argument in vindication of another world. Nor is there indeed any region, however savage in its manners and customs, where a similar belief is not entertained in some shape or other; Christianity hath dissipated the clouds of darkness, and corrected the delusions of error; the gospel places the doctrine in the clearest light, equally divested of the superstitious fables of the heathen, and the gross sensuality of the Mahometan.—We may truly affirm, that the most illiterate among Christians are, in this respect, wiser than the wisest of the Pagan world. What they only knew from the vague surmises of conjecture, and which, after all their laboured disquisitions, was still involved in some degree of uncertainty, we have the fullest assurance of. All doubts, all conjectures concerning this important

important point, have vanished before the glorious light of the gospel of truth and of righteousness.

Consider then (and may the God of mercy vouchsafe to co-operate with your reflections!) consider seriously how inexcusable, how destitute we are of every shadow of subterfuge and evasion, if we refuse the sacred evidence that is set before us! We have the credibility of a future state, not built upon the arguments of human reason, which are always fallible, not to be adopted merely as the sole refuge of the miserable and the unhappy in the gloom of despair, but established and confirmed by the open testimony of Heaven itself. He that visited the world in compassion to the sins and infirmities of mankind, died a sacrifice for our redemption, and rose again in triumph over death and the grave, for our justification: thus he became the first-fruits of them who slept, and gave us an earnest of that resurrection to glory and happiness which

we

we may all finally enjoy, provided we fulfil the terms upon which it is promised.

If they then who were destitute of the saving truths of the gospel, and guided alone by the light of nature, were notwithstanding, as being rational creatures, under an obligation of living honestly and soberly in this present life; if they were bound to endure those evils with patience to which Divine Providence thought proper to expose them, how much more are we bound to acquiesce in the decrees of Heaven!—we who, besides the evidence and admonitions of natural sense, have every duty solemnly laid down before us, and ratified by the most unquestionable proofs that any impartial person can require! All this will undoubtedly, if we persist in disobedience, be a miserable aggravation of our guilt; the more light we have to direct our steps in the right path, the heavier will our condemnation be, if we shut our eyes against the admission of its rays, and obstinately continue in the ways of error and iniquity:
for

for the word of God informs us, " that
 " unto whom much is given, of him also
 " much will be required."

Men indeed attached to the world, and
 zealous above all things to acquire its several
 pleasures, are willing to drive away the
 consideration of futurity, for this plain reason;
 —because the belief of it condemns their
 sensual pursuits, and exposes the vanity of
 devoting their hearts to the acquisition of
 perishable treasures on earth, while they
 hazard the deprivation of those that are
 perfect and immortal. But can there be a
 greater folly than this ? It is as if a man,
 by despising a certain evil, could avert it;
 or by refusing to prepare for it, could free
 himself from feeling its effects. There
 either will or will not be a future state;
 but it is by no means a circumstance that
 will be determined solely according to our
 wishes and desires. They who live in the
 midst of dissipation and immorality, in the
 open contempt of all religious principles,
 have reason to wish most fervently that
 there

there may be no life after this. As all their prospects are circumscribed by the grave, and all their desires centered in the enjoyment of present good, they cannot reflect upon the probability of a future existence without anxiety and horror. Yet, although they may drive away the thought amidst the clamours of riot and intemperance, whenever they are admonished by age or sickness that the time of their dissolution draweth nigh ; in those awful moments, when they seem on the point of bidding an eternal adieu to the world and all its gratifications, then it is they perceive the misery of their desperate situation ; the retrospect is guilt and iniquity, the looking forward punishment from the sentence of an offended God ; past enjoyments, instead of alleviating, aggravate the horrors of conscience, by calling back to the wounded mind the remembrance of past enormities.

Such is the wretched condition of those who disbelieve in a future state, from an

idea that it is repugnant to their welfare in this : but surely, if there remains no life after this, we are the most miserable of all created beings. Animals destitute of reason, are influenced alone by a sense of present pain ; nor are they ever disquieted by the fears of death, or its subsequent issues ; yet, as Solomon observes, “ that which “ befalleth the sons of men, befalleth “ beasts ; as the one dieth, so dieth the “ other : ” and if nothing remain for either after their dissolution here, the irrational animal is much the happier of the two ; for he is not tortured by the apprehensions of death, nor does the destruction of any of his own tribe impress him with the dread of similar evil. With man all this is different ; his reason, his foresight, and daily experience in scenes of mortality continually alarm him : — they prove, beyond a possibility of doubt, that the duration of his existence must at best be very short.

— It would derogate from the goodness and wisdom of the Supreme Being, to suppose that

that the faculties of reason were bestowed for the purpose of tormenting us with the fears of death, though it is the utter extinction of life for ever. But whatever gloomy sentiments the prospect of death may present to the mind of the wicked, it is an inexhaustible source of comfort to those who order their conduct here in reference to a future state, and walk in the paths of virtue and holiness; it detaches the heart from the vain pursuits of ambition and lust, and consequently, frees it from all the anxiety and distraction which the licentious passions ever bring in their train. It is finally a sure refuge in the season of adversity, and a perfect shelter against all the storms and casualties of this world.

Let all who groan under the heavy burthen of temporal evil; — ye who are oppressed by want and poverty; — ye whose bodies are a prey to sickness and disease; — ye who are doomed to bow beneath the galling yoke of cruel and arbitrary masters: — whatever the trouble and distress be under which

which you now labour, you may all derive satisfactory consolation from the prospect of futurity. Oppose the term of your present evils to the unbounded scene which is to open after their expiration, and you will clearly perceive, that the duration of the one is nothing when compared with that of the other ! In this imperfect state of our being, you will see many things apparently irregular, and peculiarly so the success and triumph of iniquity and vice, the degradation and distresses of virtue and integrity. But look forward, religiously consider the end of these things, and every captious murmur will subside in the calm tranquillity of pious resignation !

Man was not made to question, but to adore ; not to indulge in the excursions of wanton curiosity, but, from a sense of his own contracted abilities, and a consciousness of the supreme wisdom of the Deity, to acquiesce with patient submission to the will of the Almighty Ruler of the universe.

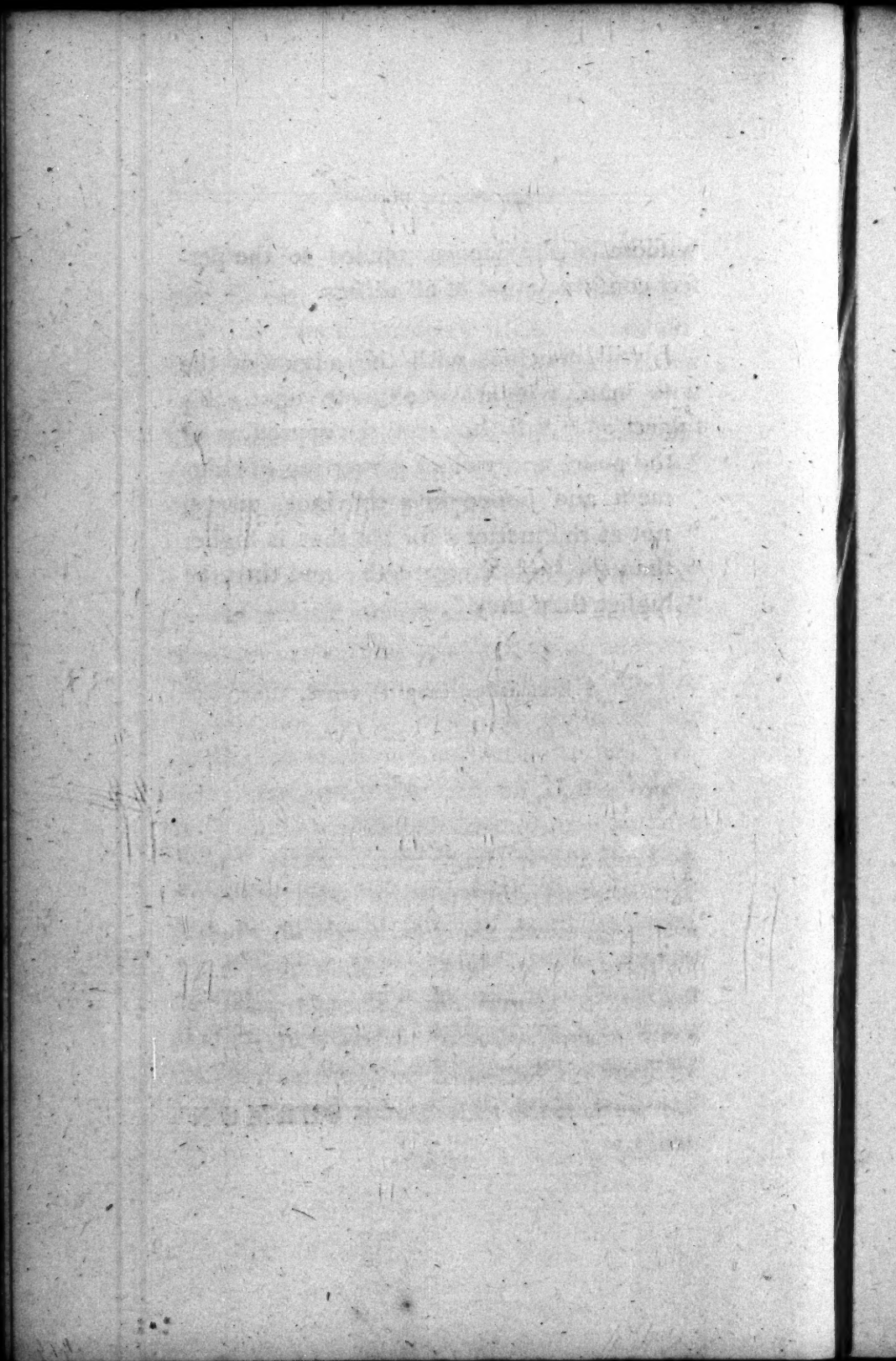
Whatever inconsistencies now appear in the system, a time will come when they shall be found harmony itself,—when all the intricate and mysterious dispensations which the forward presumption of man scrutinizes with such arrogance, shall be fully cleared up in the sight both of men and of angels.

In the mean time let us remember, that this is but the morning of our existence :—if therefore, as in the dawning of the natural day, mists and clouds now darken the scene, and circumscribe the limits of our present prospect, let us patiently wait for that hour when the Son of Righteousness shall shine in the meridian splendor, and every object, illuminated by the rays of heavenly light, shall be displayed in its true colours ;—when we shall no longer “ see “ through a glass darkly,” but be enabled, by comprehending the system in its full extent, to ascertain how the means were adapted to the end, how the intermediate arrangements, framed and disposed by the wisdom

wisdom of Providence, tended to the perfect consummation of all things.

I will conclude with the advice of the wise man, which is complete upon this subject : “ * If thou seest the oppression of
“ the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel
“ not at the matter ; for He that is higher
“ than the highest regardeth ; and there be
“ higher than they.”

* Ecclesiastes, chap. v. ver. 8.



SERMON XII.

MATTHEW, chap. xxiv. ver. 12, 13.

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

IN the beginning of this chapter, we are informed that the disciples came to Jesus, to shew him the buildings of the temple. This they probably did, that he might admire the splendor and magnificence of that boasted specimen of Jewish greatness: but he said unto them, "See ye not all these things? Verily, I say unto
P 3 " you,

“ you, there shall not be left here one
 “ stone upon another that shall not be
 “ thrown down.” And afterwards, when
 they desired to know at what time these
 things should come to pass, and what
 should be the sign of his coming and of the
 end of the world, our Saviour, among other
 matters, informs them of the evils which
 should befall the Christian church, and the
 persecutions which all they who professed
 his name must undergo from the hands of
 cruel and wicked men. “ They shall de-
 “ liver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill
 “ you: and ye shall be hated of all nations
 “ for my name’s sake. And then shall
 “ many be offended, and shall betray one
 “ another, and shall hate one another.
 “ And many false prophets shall rise, and
 “ shall deceive many: and because ini-
 “ quity shall abound, the love of many
 “ shall wax cold.” These declarations, at
 the same time that they display the pro-
 phetical powers of Christ, give us a very
 conspicuous proof of his sincerity. An im-
 possor would hardly lay before his follow-
 ers

ers such a melancholy detail of the calamities which they were to experience by avowing his doctrines ; for he must be conscious it would be very improbable that men should embrace principles so subversive of their present ease, and adhere to a system of religion which would inevitably draw upon them poverty, persecution, tortures, and death. He would on the contrary, in all likelihood, endeavour to advance his tenets by soothing the passions: he would conciliate the attachment of the avaricious by the proffer of riches, animate the zeal of ambition by the prospect of temporal honours, and allure the sensual by the charms of pleasure. The conduct of our Saviour was directly the reverse of this in every particular: “ Sell that thou hast, and give
 “ to the poor,” said he to the young man who wished to know what he should do to inherit eternal life:—He himself was despised and rejected of men ; and so far was he from promising his disciples different treatment, that he said, “ Blessed are
 “ ye when men shall revile you and per-

“secute you, and shall say all manner of
 “evil against you falsely for my sake.”
 Lastly, By adopting Christianity, they re-
 nounced all the gratifications of this life;
 and as their divine Master had not where
 to lay his head, so they, of whom the
 world was not worthy, wandered about in
 sheep skins and goat skins.

Exclusive of these difficulties that attend-
 ed the promulgation of the gospel, and to
 which the apostles and their immediate suc-
 cessors were peculiarly exposed, the words
 of the text mention another cause that would
 in all ages weaken the efficacy of religion,
 and shake the fidelity of those who out-
 wardly professed it; namely, that, notwith-
 standing the purity of Christianity, the nu-
 merous and sublime proofs of its divine
 origin, and the everlasting rewards which
 it holds out to the faithful, iniquity should
 still abound; that many, seduced by the
 prevalence of example, and poisoned by the
 contagion of evil communication, should
 swerve from the line of their duty, and
 grow

grow indifferent to the interests of virtue and holiness.

The deviations of man from the paths of moral rectitude, his defiance of the dictates of reason, and his contempt of the admonitions of true wisdom, have at all times, and in all nations, been the theme of complaint, and the topic of general invective. Not only the prophets, under the Old, and the inspired teachers, under the New Testament, have arraigned the licentiousness of the world; the heathen writers also abound in pathetic representations of the depravity of mankind, in severe reprehensions of their gross vices, and in beautiful descriptions of the amiable nature of virtue.

It hath been a matter of great difficulty to many to account for the introduction and continuation of natural and moral evil in the world, without arraigning the attributes, and questioning the perfections of God. That there is much evil of both kinds upon earth, is a truth to which we must

must subscribe without hesitation ; for every view of mankind gives us ocular evidence of it : and that the Supreme Being is infinite in goodness, is likewise a truth which no Christian can deny. How then comes it to pass, under the providence of a God, whose power is also infinite, that man is subjected to so many calamities, and that iniquity possesses so much influence ? We cannot have been created by a beneficent Deity to be miserable ; why, therefore, does not his power exert itself in the prevention of all evil ? The ancient Persian philosophers, in order that they might clear up this arduous point, supposed that there was an infinite evil principle, independent upon and opposite to the infinite good one. Against these, Esaias declares in his prophecy to Cyrus king of Persia ; “ * I form the light, and create darkness ; I make peace, and create evil : “ I the Lord do all these things.” Their opinion however was adopted by numbers

* Isaiab, chap. xlv. ver. 7.

in the third century, under the guidance of Manichæus, from whom this sect took its name. This doctrine, nevertheless, whatever specious arguments may have been urged in its favour (for there is no absurdity that eloquence cannot recommend to men,—and external sanctity induce them to embrace) this doctrine, I say, is easily overthrown. To ascribe influence of such extent, and such baleful tendency to an evil dæmon, is surely to abridge the power of the Most High, and to derogate in a considerable degree from that goodness which constitutes his most exalted attribute. Why then, it may be said, if God be Almighty, are not all things made for good?—This is perhaps one of those mysteries which, limited as we are in the term of our present existence, and contracted in our intellectual faculties, we may neither have time nor ability to comprehend fully:—yet still there is sufficient, both from reason and revelation, to justify the ways of God, and to calm our minds with regard to this subject. If iniquity doth abound, let us remember
that

that man is a moral agent, not a machine impelled by irresistible force. Good and evil are set before us; we have reason to direct us in our choice; and when we act contrary to this direction, there is a monitor within our breast to call us back to the path from which we have deviated. In addition to the remonstrances of conscience, and the effects that may be supposed to result frequently from inward remorse, our Creator hath vouchsafed to set before us our religious duties by repeated revelations,—revelations, the divine origin of which is confirmed by indisputable evidence. And as misery entered into the world by the transgression of our first parents, our Saviour came in the fulness of time to make atonement for original sin, and to reinstate man in his forfeited inheritance. That God still suffers iniquity to abound; that he doth not cut off all evil-doers at once from the face of the earth, is the effect of his mercy; for he is patient and long-suffering, willing that every sinner should repent, and save his soul alive. But if we disregard all the admonitions

monitions of our Lord; if our obduracy is not softened by the consideration of his gracious forbearance, nor our fears excited by the apprehension of that vengeance which will finally overwhelm the disobedient and impenitent, his justice will be fully vindicated when he shall come in the clouds of Heaven, and pass the irreversible sentence of condemnation upon the wicked.

In the mean time, since this is a state of trial, it follows that many will fall under the power of temptation, and that, because iniquity doth abound, it will abound yet more and more. Melancholy indeed must the reflections of every well-disposed person be, when he considers the general wickedness of the world; when he looks about him and sees the furious struggles for wealth and power, in which every tie of religion is cancelled, and every claim of justice, charity, and humanity, is totally disregarded; when, on the other hand, he beholds the dominions of vice enlarged by the triumphs of voluptuousness, and the divine
image

image which God impressed upon the form of man almost obliterated by the pursuit of sensual pleasures. But as it is undeniably true that the world is thus corrupt, it becomes necessary for us to be admonished of this truth, lest our hearts wax cold in the service due to our Maker; lest we be drawn by the prevalence of bad example, and seduced by the contagion of sin into the unhappy number of those who reject the means of grace, and renounce the inheritance of everlasting glory.

I will therefore, in the first place, consider this subject, in reference to the causes which our Saviour said would produce increase of wickedness in the days of his disciples. Secondly, I will examine it with regard to the times in which we live; and lastly, I will endeavour to enforce the necessity of perseverance in the ways of righteousness; for "he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

All

All men are fond of life: nay, so strong is this attachment, that the wish to preserve our existence frequently predominates even when the mind is a prey to anguish and affliction that cannot be redressed, and the body is disruciated by the torments of disease that art and medicine cannot remove. The great object therefore of man is, to pursue those things that seem likely to secure his happiness, and cautiously to avoid whatever may be destructive of his ease and comfort. It is no just argument against this position to allege, that numbers perpetually engage in schemes which must infallibly counteract their real good. The error in their choice arises from rashness or want of wisdom; and they are impelled by the violence of their passions to search after happiness from those plans which can never lead them to the acquisition of it. Let us apply this general desire, implanted in the human breast, of seeking ease and avoiding misery, to the subject before us.

When

When the apostles entered upon the grand work of propagating the gospel of Christ, they were not unacquainted with the difficulties of their ministry, nor ignorant of the calamities that would befall them in the various trials which their faith must undergo; for their Lord and Master had previously informed them. They themselves indeed were endowed with peculiar powers from above, and enabled to execute their commission, arduous as it really was, by divine inspiration. Nothing less surely than this heavenly assistance could have supported them in the conflicts which they uniformly sustained; and the conviction that their sufferings would be finally and fully compensated, must have been firmly established, otherwise they would, of all men, have been most miserable. But though the apostles were thus confirmed in their adherence to the Christian profession; though they cheerfully embraced all the evils of poverty, encountered the obstinacy of opposition and the terrors of persecution with inflexible fortitude, and even
laid

laid down their lives willingly, rather than abandon their religious sentiments ; although they endured thus unto the end, we cannot be surpris'd that our Saviour's words should have been verified, and that the love of many, in those seasons of danger, should have waxed cold. Even in our days, when the arm of earthly vengeance is no longer rais'd against Christians, when we are no longer subjected to poverty, nor necessarily excluded from any of the conveniences of life, on account of our religious principles, how many are there, who either wholly abjure the tenets of Christianity, or, while they profess them with their lips, act in direct opposition to them, though the same eternal rewards are propos'd to our obedience ! We cannot then justly wonder that there should have been frequent instances of apostacy in the age of which we are now treating ; that numbers should have been deterred from embracing the faith, by the consideration of the calamities to which they would expose themselves, and that many who had embraced it, should, in the

hour

hour of distress and persecution, renounce their religion for the security of their property, or for the preservation of their lives. These are the ruling objects that engross almost the whole attention of the human mind. Next to the preservation of life, we naturally wish to acquire those things that may render it easy and comfortable: and among them mankind have generally placed a certain portion of wealth, according to their respective stations. For, however some austere and recluse philosophers may have occasionally exerted their eloquence against riches, yet very few have been ready to make a voluntary sacrifice of them, and submit to indigence and mortification, when they had the means of pleasure and enjoyment in their hands. Now what was the life of a Christian in the earlier days of the gospel? What was it then to take up the cross, and follow Christ? It was to bid adieu to all the conveniences of life;—instead of honour and respect, to attach to themselves infamy and contempt; instead of acquiring security, to encounter peril;
instead

instead of ease, to walk in those rugged paths, where every avenue almost led to distress, torments, and death. " Then shall
 " they deliver you up to be afflicted, and
 " shall kill you, and ye shall be hated of all
 " nations for my name's sake. And then
 " shall many be offended, and shall betray one
 " another, shall hate one another." This last is a very natural circumstance. They who are destitute of courage to stand firm against danger, are easily led to adopt any expedients that seem capable of obviating it. One of these is treachery towards the party with whom they are united. They flatter themselves that, by betraying their confederates, they shall ingratiate themselves with their powerful enemies, and by rendering their assistance useful to them, conciliate their good-will. Hence many false brethren abandoned the cause which, at the same time, they could not but acknowledge to be the cause of Heaven, and sacrificed those whose principles they could not but approve, and whose fortitude they in their hearts admired.

Our Saviour also alleges another reason why iniquity would abound. "Many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many."* The Christian church was scarcely formed, when, in different places, there started up certain pretended reformers, who, not satisfied with the simplicity of that religion which was taught by the apostles, meditated changes of doctrine and worship, and set up a new religion drawn from their own licentious imaginations. The world was then divided into Jews and Heathens. The former rigidly adhered to the rites and ceremonies of the law of Moses. And whatever importance they might attribute to the character and doctrine of Christ, they uniformly rejected him as their Messiah. Perverting the sense of the ancient oracles, they looked for a redeemer who should reign in earthly glory, and exalt their nation above their enemies by the splendor of triumph, and the glories of universal empire. The Heathens were sunk in idolatry and volup-

* Mosheim, vol. i. ch. 5.—See Maclaine's Translation.

tuousness:

tuousness:—they had lost the knowledge of the true God, and worshipped a number of deities, to whom they ascribed vices, which disgrace even human nature. Yet, in this deplorable state, they were proud of their learning, and looked down with contempt upon the simplicity of the Christian religion. Such being the situation of the world, many who wished to avoid the determined and bitter hostility of the Jew and Gentile, corrupted the purity of the gospel, and moulded it to the fashion of the times. Some were for forcing the doctrines of Christianity into a conformity with the philosophical systems they had adopted, while others were as studious to blend with these doctrines the opinions, customs, and traditions of the Jews.

The consequence of these heresies was, that numbers, on the one hand, became Christians by profession, but were destitute of the true spirit of Christianity; and that numbers, on the other, revolted from the instructions of the apostles, and no longer

walked after the tradition which they had received of them. Many probably, confirmed in the errors of Pagan superstition, wished to incorporate as much as they could of their ancient rites with the religion of Christ: and many undoubtedly subscribed to these mixed systems, that they might shelter themselves against the violence of persecution; and by rendering their doctrines, in some measure, palatable to the gross conceptions of the age, mitigate the fury which they saw uniformly fall upon real Christians.

Such were the principal circumstances that verified our Saviour's prediction; and from these causes did "iniquity then abound, and the love of many wax cold." It remains for me to consider why this is the case at present, and to shew you the necessity of persevering in the ways of righteousness, because "he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." But this must be referred to another opportunity.

In

In the mean time, from what has been already said, we may gather sufficient motives to excite our attention, and animate our vigilance. If they who heard the apostles, and were eye-witnesses of the wonderful works that attested the divinity of their mission; if some of them nevertheless rejected the word, and some apostatized from the faith, we surely ought to walk with circumspection; and as we are surrounded by temptations, we ought to be constantly on our guard, lest we be hardened, through the deceitfulness of sin. Let us, therefore, seek the Lord early while he may be found; let us call upon him while he is near; before we be overtaken by the shadow of death, when that night cometh wherein no man can work. And may the grace of God, which is able to raise even the dead to life, enable us to finish this our great work, before the things that belong to our peace be hid from our eyes!

SERMON

SERMON XIII.

MATTHEW, chap. xxiv. ver. 12 and 13.

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

IN a preceding discourse upon these words, I first adverted to some objections raised against the attributes of God, on account of the introduction and continuance of evil in the world. In the next place, I treated of the causes why iniquity abounded in the earlier age of the gospel, and why the love of many then waxed cold. I will now proceed

proceed to consider the reasons why this is the case at present.

The principal cause to which the aversion of mankind to the profession of Christianity was at first owing, was the unavoidable and severe evils unto which the avowal of their faith exposed them. Both Jew and Gentile united in their virulent opposition to the followers of Christ: little lenity could be expected from the inflexible bigotry of the one, and as little indulgence from the loose and voluptuous idolatry of the other. Whoever, therefore, consulted his present ease, and regarded his security, was naturally inclined to reject the gospel; consequently, it was not wonderful that iniquity should abound, and the love of many wax cold. The very disciples themselves, we know, when our Lord was delivered into the hands of his enemies, and the powers of darkness triumphed, yielded to the influence of fear. At that dangerous and trying crisis, they all forsook him, and fled. The conviction that he was truly the Son of God, and the
Saviour

Saviour promised from the foundation of the world, was not able to secure their attachment, and preserve their fidelity in that season of distress and persecution.

These terrors, indeed, are now by the merciful providence of God, removed from us. The Christian religion is so far from being persecuted by the governing powers, that it is established, maintained, and promoted by them. The adoption of it is so far from counteracting our endeavours in the pursuit of honours and dignities, that we cannot possess them without at least a verbal declaration of our belief, and an external compliance with the most sacred rite of the church. Yet still, though we neither abandon our property, nor abridge ourselves of the conveniences and comforts of the world, nor hazard our liberty and lives by being sincere Christians, it is undeniably true, That iniquity nevertheless doth abound, and the love of many wax cold. If the life of a Christian was, as hath been already shewn, a life of danger, we are assured

fured by the Scriptures, that it will ever be a life of trial : and were it not, our adherence to the word of God and our continuance in the ways of righteousness, would be little entitled to eternal happiness ; for such a sublime recompense is too valuable to be conferred upon services which, in that case, would have but a poor claim to any reward. We are commanded to work out our salvation with fear and trembling ; with fear, on account of the formidable temptations which surround us ; with trembling, lest, by negligence and want of fortitude in our spiritual warfare, we be found unworthy of the benefits which the merits of Christ have procured. Every allurements that tends to corrupt our hearts and alienate us from the pure precepts of the gospel, is an enemy whom we are called upon to resist. As long, therefore, as these temptations remain, there will be danger ; and the more mankind yield to the attack, the more will iniquity abound.

The

The rigorous inclemency of cold and frost arrests the active powers of man, and by benumbing the limbs, renders them incompetent to tasks of labour and toil. Nor is the intense application of heat less detrimental. The languor and faintness which it generates in the body, produce debility, and render the frame equally inadequate to those efforts that we ought to exert. The same mode of reasoning may be applied to the two states of adversity and prosperity. The former is apt to extinguish the spirit of resolution, to deaden the ardour of activity; and by the gloomy clouds of distress which are condensed around us, it involves us in the chilling and ungenial shades of despair. The latter operates with equal malignity, and is no less subversive of the duties we owe to God and man. He that basks in the clear sunshine of prosperity, is insensibly debilitated, and led to lose all thought of the future in present enjoyments. Finding himself possessed of the ability to gratify his desire of pleasure, he considers attention to the miseries of others

as

as the intrusive embitterer of his own repose ; his heart, consequently, becomes indifferent to the claims of his brethren, and must of course wax cold in its adoration of the Supreme Being ; for its whole good is centered in earthly gratifications.

Is this the effusion of a declamatory moralist, or is it the representation of a rare and an uncommon case, a picture drawn rather from fancy than from nature ? Would it were either ! But alas ! the world exhibits examples in confirmation of what has been mentioned, too numerous to be overlooked, and too striking to be controverted. If many sink under the pressure of affliction when their schemes are defeated, arraign the dispensations, and question the justice of God, because their portion in this life is evil, how many, on the other hand, are seduced into the paths of iniquity by the smiles of fortune ! What numbers, while Divine Providence favours their endeavours, and showers down temporal blessings upon them,

them, are wholly forgetful of their Benefactor, praise not the Lord for his goodness, nor interest themselves in the least for the benefit of their brethren; thus violating at once the two great duties upon which hang all the law and the prophets, and without the practice of which, the profession of Christianity is an empty shadow. It cannot be wondered that this sensual depravity, so conspicuous in the lives of the rich and prosperous, should have a pernicious effect upon others. Even the just and righteous; men who acknowledged the supremacy of God, and were conscious that all things were directed by unerring wisdom, have been disquieted by the view of prosperous wickedness, and almost tempted to swerve from the line of religious resignation. "Behold," says David, "these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." If David's feet were almost gone, and his steps had

" well

“ well nigh slipped,” on account of the triumphant and flourishing condition of the wicked, how much more is this likely to be the case of weaker men, who seldom enter into the sanctuary of God for a resolution of their perplexing doubts. And if, for want of attention to the declarations of scripture, they are led to question the power, or to think lightly of the justice and goodness of their Creator, the transition is easy from irreligious speculation to irreligious practice. When they contemplate the present security of the wicked; when they consider that wealth, however unjustly accumulated, procures the enjoyment of every kind of pleasure, and that elevated rank, without a grain of real merit in the possessor of it, conciliates external respect and servile obsequiousness; when they reflect upon these things, and at the same time feel no restraint from the apprehension of divine judgment, they will hardly feel much from a sense of moral obligations. Hence it has frequently happened, that men, contemplating

plating honours or riches as the sole objects worthy of their pursuit, have made no scruple of violating the most solemn ties of religion and humanity, when the violation seemed likely to facilitate the accomplishment of their wishes. Thus iniquity may be said not only to abound, but by abounding, to extend the limits of its dominions. This will appear in a still stronger light, from what I am about to mention.

The power of fashion is very manifest: and it would be well for the world if it were confined to the levities of dress, or if its authority only superintended the forms and ceremonies in the departments of polite life. But alas! unhappily for the real welfare of mankind, this influence is not alone exerted in those comparatively unimportant matters. Fashion predominates in a wider sphere of action: — this arbitrary dæmon controuls the very vital principles of morality, and invalidates the solemn precepts of religion itself. The highest claims of

R

virtue

virtue and piety are sacrificed, with indifference and unconcern, to the tyranny of custom.

That gaming is a vicious propensity, no rational person will surely deny; that the life of a gamester is a state of disquietude, alarm, and perturbation, is clear, because all his hopes ultimately rest upon the precarious co-operation of chance; and the accumulated gain of years may be lost by the fatal casualties of a single evening; and that the miseries which attend persons of this stamp are manifold and heavy, is evident from the various instances of distress which this metropolis exhibits. We frequently see men, in a moment, reduced from affluence to poverty; nor does the evil terminate here. Whole families are involved in the miserable consequences: indigence and want are entailed upon an innocent and unoffending posterity, by the wanton rashness of an infatuated individual. Yet, notwithstanding these calamitous, these common effects, we can hardly name any depra-

depravity more prevalent in the present age.

Though there be in man an inherent tendency to wickedness, the passion for gaming cannot be wholly ascribed to this natural corruption. Vice generally makes its approaches under the captivating form of pleasure, and acquires votaries by the promise of earthly good. Now, what gratification is to be secured by play? In the first place, our own property is consigned to hazard: in the next, if it be fortunately enlarged by success, the augmentation on our side arises from a diminution of the wealth of some other person. Such an increase of revenue cannot be very grateful to the feelings of any humane person; and whatever comforts this accession of wealth may admit him to the participation of, they must be embittered by the reflection that, in all probability, they are procured by the misery of others. Besides, this vice, for the most part, predominates among men of rank and fortune. Were it not evident

beyond dispute, it would be hardly credible that any opulent person should be thus ensnared. He is possessed, by his elevated condition, of all that can gratify pride, and able, by his riches, to enjoy all the luxuries of this world. What then can tempt him thus to consign the means of his ease and happiness to the casual arbitration of a dye? Any addition he may make to his estate will contribute little towards extending the boundaries of his enjoyments. What then can induce him to expose that, by which years of delight may be secured, to the chance of a moment? These are questions not to be solved by a reference to the common cause of iniquity, namely, the hope of pleasing gratifications. Such irrational conduct must be imputed to the force of fashion, and the powerful contagion of evil association. Many are so confirmed by habit in immoral courses, that what they at first loathed and looked upon with abhorrence and detestation, they hold essentially necessary to their comfort; and many are so strongly attached, by daily intercourse, to abandoned
com-

panions, that the approbation of the most worthless is their highest glory, and the censure of the most profligate the only ignominy they dread. Provided they can ensure the first and obviate the latter, they care not what breaches they make in the moral or divine law ; while fashion dignifies them with the title of men of spirit, and their associates enroll them in the list of men of honour, they bid defiance to all the dictates of wisdom, and trample upon all the commands of religion : it cannot then be wondered that, on this account, iniquity should abound, and the love of many wax cold.

Marriage has in all ages been accounted the most important of the relative connexions in life ; it hath everywhere received the attention of legislators, and been among all people consecrated by the solemn ceremonies of religion. In so awful a light was this tie regarded by the Jews, that the law of Moses condemned those who were guilty of adultery to no less a punishment

than death. And indeed, when we consider the great influence that marriage hath in society, we shall not be surprized that it hath obtained so much notice among men: yet venerable as the institution is from the principles of religion, and important as it is on account of its manifold advantages to society, it is unhappily true that, in our days, numerous instances shew what little weight it possesses. Amidst the causes to which this flagrant violation of the nuptial bond may be ascribed, the force of example is not the least considerable. When breaches are daily made in the laws of morality and religion, without the transgressors suffering from legal interference, and even without their encountering the reproaches of public contempt, it cannot be astonishing that the virtue of others should wax cold, and that they should sacrifice the duties of piety to the seducing allurements of licentious pleasure. Though adultery be a crime expressly prohibited by the law of God; though the peace of families be subverted, and the future welfare of children intercepted

intercepted by it, fashion has contrived to disguise its real nature, and to diminish the detestation which it merits, by giving it the specious name of Gallantry. Hence it comes to pass, that, while numbers are repeatedly cut off by an ignominious death for crimes far less heinous in the sight of Heaven, and far less detrimental to the interests of the community, the fashionable adulterer openly triumphs in his iniquity, and, because he escapes the tribunal of men, he hesitates not to brave that of his God. When the manners of the great are thus corrupted, it follows of course that the inferior orders of men must, in some degree, partake of the contamination; for the fountain that is vitiated cannot but communicate its baneful qualities to every stream with which its waters are blended in their progress.

It would be an easy matter to expatiate more largely upon this subject, by advert-
ing to other kinds of wickedness that origi-
nate from similar sources; but as the ob-

servations already made are sufficient to elucidate the point proposed, such a minute enquiry is at present unnecessary. Let us however remember, that the real nature of things is not altered by opinion or custom : the distinctions between virtue and vice are immutable ; and though men may, in compliance with fashion, or in obedience to the temptations of the world, conceal the native deformity of the latter by the ornaments of a specious dress, its essence will always be the same. The word of God, which is truth itself, conforms not with the perverted notions of mankind ; it pronounces lust, Adultery, and duelling Murder. He, therefore, who acquiesces in the absurd decisions of men, and orders his conduct, not according to the dictates of reason, but by the determination of modern manners, may be said to esteem the praise of men more than the praise of God. It requires indeed some degree of firmness to stand undaunted amidst the bitter scoffs of prosperous infidelity, and a considerable portion of resolution to keep our virtue secure against the open

open and insidious attacks of temptation ; yet this we must endeavour to do to inherit eternal life ; for “ he that shall endure unto “ the end, the same shall be saved.” No one it is true can attain unfulfilled purity ; we are by nature corrupt ; infirmity may impede our steps in the paths of duty, inadvertency may surprize us, and want of ability will ever render our best endeavours incomplete ; but we are not to be weighed in the scales of justice unqualified with mercy : salvation is the gift of God’s grace, through the merits of Christ, and not attainable solely by our own efforts, nor to be demanded as the due reward of our pious services, however eminent they may seem in our eyes. Miserable would our condition be, if eternal happiness were to be awarded to the performance of particular duties, and those duties at the same time faintly pointed out : the terms of our acceptance are so clearly and unequivocally proposed, that no one can plead ignorance : it is the business of earthly wisdom to encounter labour in proportion to the value of the object to be gained :

gained : where that is great, men willingly endure toil, and cheerfully expose themselves to danger. Now what are the highest acquisitions in this world compared with the blessings of Heaven ! And if we are zealous to conciliate the patronage of those by whom our temporal interests may be advanced, how much more should we endeavour to please Him “ in whom we live, “ move, and have our being !” Our creation and preservation, the means of grace and the hope of glory, are all the voluntary gifts of Divine Goodness. Our merits cannot claim such exalted attention from our Creator, nor can any returns we make, in the least contribute to the promotion of his happiness. The benefits imparted to man by our gracious Benefactor, are the effects of the purest and most disinterested love. Shall we then deny him the tribute of gratitude ? Shall we refuse to pay that service which is our bounden duty, and which will finally conduct us to eternal life ?

Let

Let all those who have hitherto made the word of God the rule of their actions, persevere in the ways of religion, and thus make their election sure ! For “ * it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness at all, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them ! ” Let those persons who have hitherto contemned the ordinances of the Lord, and given up their hearts to the delusions of iniquity, reflect in time upon their perilous condition ! Let them consider that the day is far spent, and that the shades of death are gathering fast around them ! Mercy is still within their reach : rebellious as they have been, they may yet regain the favour of their God, and by sincere penitence obliterate the deepest stains of guilt : but if they obstinately persist in wickedness, the proffered mercy will be finally withdrawn from them ; for the Supreme Being is a God of justice, and will infallibly reward every one according to his works.

* 2 Peter, chap. ii. ver. 20.

THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON
FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT
TO THE PRESENT TIME
IN TWO VOLUMES
BY NATHANIEL BENTLEY
VOL. I.
BOSTON: PUBLISHED BY
J. B. ALLEN, 1822.

VOL. I.

S E R M O N X I V .

ST. JAMES, chap. ii. ver. 10.

*Whoſoever ſhall keep the whole law, and yet
offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*

WHEN a ſincere Chriſtian conſiders,
on the one hand, the purity of life
which he is called upon by his religion to
attain, and, on the other, the impoſſibility
of eſcaping the judgment of God, as he
cannot but acknowledge himſelf deficient
in the former point, he muſt of courſe dread
being expoſed to the vengeance of the lat-
ter. Let his piety have been ever ſo emi-
nent,

nent, when compared with the more flagrant iniquity of others, he must still be sensible that he can claim no rewards from the tribunal of the Most High by his own intrinsic merits. When he retires from the tumult of the world, communes seriously with his own heart, and enters into an impartial review of his past days, he will recollect many lapses and failings; he will call to mind many opportunities that were offered for the display of Christian virtues, which he neglected to improve properly; many instances in which performance was far below what it ought to have been, and very inferior to what it might have been by the full exertion of the abilities that were bestowed. Such, I believe, will be the reflections of even the best men, when they recur to meditations of this kind. And what must be the effects of them in the breast of a real believer? As he knows that sin is a breach of the divine law, and therefore an object of punishment, he will be zealous to avert or mitigate the sentence of condemnation: he will, of course, endeavour.

deavour to appease the anger of God by contrition, and conciliate by fidelity the favour of Him whose displeasure he hath excited by disobedience. When a man has in a flagrant degree violated those laws by which alone the welfare of society can be maintained, it is incompatible with the good of the community that his iniquity should pass unpunished; it is expedient that he should suffer, in order that others may be deterred from similar offences by the fear of similar evil; but the Almighty stands in no need of such means for the maintenance of his security: his felicity can neither be increased by the faithful attachment, nor impaired by the disobedience of mortals; being infinite in mercy and goodness, he hath indeed created us all for happiness; for which purpose he hath given us laws, and endowed us with reason to comprehend them.

Since our creation and preservation are to be ascribed to the voluntary exertion of his goodness,—and all the blessings which
we

we hope to participate in future must flow from the same gracious source, it is undoubtedly our first duty to obey Him unto whom, unworthy as we are, we stand so highly indebted: it is also our supreme interest to secure the protection of Him who can alone be our effectual support; for in his hands only are the issues of life and death. As we cannot therefore contemplate the Deity in the light of our common parent without emotions of gratitude, so neither can we reflect upon his majesty and power without awe and reverence.

On account of this union of the most superior obligations, the Scriptures require from us uniform obedience to the ordinances of Heaven; They command us to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our understanding; that is, that every principle within us which can testify our religious sentiments, should be invariably exerted for that purpose. — Under the Mosaical dispensation, the people were called upon to a rigid,

rigid, constant, and full acquiescence with the statutes delivered to them by their legislator. It is there said, “ * Curfed be he
 “ that confirmeth not all the words of this
 “ law to do them :” nor is the injunction
 less positive or less comprehensive under
 the gospel ; “ † Whofoever shall break one
 “ of these least commandments, and shall
 “ teach men so, he shall be called the least
 “ in the kingdom of Heaven :” in like
 manner St. James affirms, “ Whofoever
 “ shall keep the whole law, and yet offend
 “ in one point, he is guilty of all.” What
 then, it may be urged, is there no difference
 between crimes ? Are all offences
 reducible to the same standard of criminality ? Or is he that sins in one point
 only, equally guilty with him who knows
 no restraint, but passively follows where-
 ever his depraved passions lead him ? If
 this is the case, truly miserable must the

* Deuteronomy, chap. xxvii. ver. 26.

† Matthew, chap. v. ver. 19.

lot of mortals be; for since no one can boast undeviating rectitude in the paths of piety, nor can truly say "he hath made his heart clean, and is pure from sin," no one can, upon this supposition, flatter himself that he shall be able to escape condemnation.

Were such doctrine justly deducible from the words of the apostle, we should of all created beings be the most miserable: the powers of reason by which we are so eminently distinguished, instead of a blessing, would then be a curse: they would condense the shades of despair around us into a mass of impenetrable gloom, by pointing out to us a state of the purest and most sublime happiness, and at the same time shewing our total want of ability to attain it.

But the passage in the text, however positive and strong it may appear at first sight, and when considered as detached from what follows, does not really place us in so unhappy a predicament. The apostle's

tle's affirmation is explained by himself in the subsequent verse : " For he that said " Do not commit adultery, said also Do not " kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, " yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law." " Whosoever therefore shall keep the whole law, and yet " offend in one point, he is guilty of all ;" that is, * he as truly diminishes the honour of the law, and despises the authority of the law-giver, as he that offends in more points: he is as truly become a transgressor of the law, and as really derogates from its authority, as if he were guilty of more transgressions ; not that he who offends in one point is as great a sinner or deserves as severe a punishment as he that offends in more ; but he as truly derogates from the authority of the law, and of him who gave it, though not in so great a degree. The honour therefore due to the laws of God, is diminished by sin, and the more wilful

and contemptuous any sin be, so much the greater is the infringement of that honour.

Admit this explication of the words, every difficulty is removed; and that this is their real meaning, is obvious from the apostle's deduction: for we cannot suppose him to assert that every deviation from the commands of God, however comparatively slight, is equally heinous with the perpetration of complicated and heavier crimes. This would subvert the very foundations of all religion which are established in the mercy of the Supreme Being. We know that we are all children of wrath and sons of disobedience; so far are the best of us from being able to claim rewards by our own intrinsic deserts, that the salvation of the most righteous men must finally rest in the merits of our Saviour, and can alone be procured by that propitiatory blood which was shed upon the cross for the expiation of the sins of the whole world.

If

If God were extreme to mark what is done amiss, who could abide his judgment? If all offences were equal in his sight, and a single breach of religion equal in delinquency to the commission of manifold crimes, the means of grace would be ineffectual, and the hope of glory entirely banished from the human breast.

All legislators have found it necessary to repress iniquity by penal terrors; they have accordingly attached punishment to those actions by which the rights of individuals are violated, or the welfare of society endangered. Should a criminal be arraigned for robbery, it would be no absolute exculpation, if he alleged that he had not added murder; nor will the forbearance of the latter, though it originate from compunctions of conscience, absolve him from the sentence denounced against the former. In doubtful cases indeed, where the charge is not substantiated by conclusive evidence, a reference may be properly made to the general tenour of the accused person's life;

and if that appear manifestly to have been upon the whole, moral and virtuous, it may be admitted as a strong plea against the probability of guilt in the instance adduced; but open crimes must receive the sentence of the law, though particular and palliating circumstances may suspend and avert the infliction of it by the interference of that discretionary power with which the hands of executive government are wisely invested.

Can we imagine that the Judge of all the earth will do less righteously? That he who hath established unalterable distinctions between good and evil, looks with indifference upon virtue and piety which he hath sanctioned by the promise of reward, and beholds without abhorrence iniquity, against which he hath denounced indignation and vengeance? Or can we suppose that he, whose tender mercy is over all his works, will scrutinize every human failing with extreme rigour, and make no difference between error and voluntary guilt;

guilt ; between actions avowedly committed against the dictates of conscience; and the casual lapses of natural infirmity ?

The word of God, that word which is truth itself, informs us that a day is reserved by the Most High for the final distribution of impartial and universal justice ; and we may rest assured, that condemnation will then be passed, not upon the imperfections inseparable from our corrupt nature ; not upon the delusions of insuperable ignorance, or the accidental deviations that have arisen from inadvertency and weakness, but upon presumptuous offences ; crimes that have been perpetrated through a wilful contempt of the light of reason, and in open defiance of the prohibitions of revealed religion. We have the strongest assurance that the decision will be such, since “ God so loved the world, that he “ gave his only begotten Son, to the end “ that all that believe in him should not “ perish, but have everlasting life ;” and he who voluntarily submitted to the lowest

state of humiliation, and became obedient unto death, even the death upon the cross, that he might redeem the sons of men, is to be our Judge in the great day of universal retribution. But while these reflections on the mercy of God tend to alleviate the terrors which must arise from the contemplation of his unlimited knowledge, His almighty power and unerring justice, while they enable us amidst our complicated transgressions to look up to the throne of grace, animated by the hope of eternal life, through the merits of Jesus Christ, let us not arrogantly presume that we are in a state of security! that our faith is such as no temptations can subvert, or that our piety hath been so pure and uniform, that it may without diffidence claim immortal happiness at the tribunal of our Redeemer.

If many pious Christians, truly exemplary by a life of righteousness, have been unable to turn their thoughts towards final judgment without fear and trembling, because they were conscious how unworthy
even

even their best endeavours must appear in the presence of perfect holiness,—numbers we know have run into the other extreme; have supposed themselves, from the adoption of particular tenets, or from conceited notions of their own worthiness, infallibly placed in the happy list of the elect. That such arrogance is incompatible with the declarations of scripture, is evident; for we are told, that after all, we are still unprofitable servants; that is, we can claim little for merely having done our duty; that our best actions, when compared with what is due to the majesty and goodness of God, are of trifling value; and that all our hopes of acceptance must ultimately rest, not in the merit of our virtues, however eminent they may seem in our own eyes, but in the operation of divine mercy. Besides, is there no danger in this opinion of perfect security? He who believes that there is none, must be obdurately insensible to the evidence of daily experience. How often is the strength of a man foiled by his antagonist, not because it is really inferior

inferior to that of his opponent, but because a consciousness of superiority, begetting too much confidence, precludes necessary caution. The greatest and best appointed armies have frequently been defeated by a similar reliance upon their own superior strength, and a careless contempt of their adversaries: thus the very means of success produce defeat, and that which would have ensured safety, by destroying circumspection, becomes the source of ruin. Shall we then despise these admonitions of the vanity of human confidence? Shall we presumptuously trust to our own powers in concerns of much higher importance; and while we are surrounded by enemies that war against our everlasting welfare, enemies that do not always direct their attack in the forms of avowed and open hostility, but who are more dangerous, because they frequently make their approaches under the banners of friendship, and seduce us into the paths of destruction by the insidious blandishments of pleasure or interest? In a state thus hourly exposed to danger, shall

we

we be careless and inattentive? and, because we have hitherto eluded the vigilance of our adversary, shall we improvidently neglect the only means by which our preservation can be completely secured? Our virtue may at present be active, our faith firm, and our actions agreeable to the spirit of Christianity; yet while we are surrounded by foes, caution is necessary; and while temptations daily assail us, fortitude must be exerted without remission, lest the fruits of our former triumphs be snatched from us in a moment, and our endeavours, hitherto successful, terminate in disgrace and misery. The Scriptures animate us to the discharge of our several duties by example as well as precept; there is sufficient in them to confound the vanity of presumption, and silence the ostentatious boasts of self-conceited merit. We read of many, who altho' particularly distinguished by their righteousness as the servants of the living God, were occasionally unable to resist the power of temptation, and in the hour of trial fell a sacrifice to the snares of sin. I will mention

tion only one instance. When our Lord, knowing that the time of his sufferings drew nigh, informed his disciples that their fidelity would yield to the impressions of fear; that they would all forsake him in the dangerous crisis, and consult their personal safety by flight, St. Peter, full of zeal in the service of his Master, and fired at the imputation of such apostacy, boldly avowed his readiness even to die in support of the faith which he had professed. Yet how soon did the emptiness of these zealous protestations appear! He not only denied his Lord and Saviour, but aggravated his desertion by oaths and imprecations. This is a memorable proof how easily the fortitude of those who think themselves invincible may be overthrown by the terrors of evil: and how easily the principles of virtue are undermined and subverted by the charms of pleasure, dignity, and wealth, there is little reason to shew, for every day's experience manifestly demonstrates it.

It

It is evident, therefore, from examples set before us for our instruction, and from the evidence which falls within our own knowledge, upon what a sandy and insecure foundation the structure of human presumption is erected ! How easily it can be demolished, and how probable the disaster is, on account of the numerous and formidable assailants that perpetually beset us. Nor is unremitted circumspection more necessary from the dangers to which we are exposed, than from the miserable consequences which we may probably entail upon ourselves, by violating the duties to which we are bound to adhere. He that transgresses the law in one single point, provided the transgression does not originate from insurmountable ignorance, is guilty of avowed contempt of God's commands, and of course obnoxious to that punishment which is denounced against the wicked. The only method of obliterating the stains of iniquity is sincere contrition, testified by a total renunciation of the evil of our ways. It is a very superficial degree ; it is the mere shadow of repentance

pentance to feel the compunctions of remorse one moment, if immediately after we forget the impression, and sink again into the gulph of sin. The mercy of God, indeed, is such, that no bounds can be affixed to it by us : but he whose life passes in the vicissitudes of iniquity and remorse, in sinning one day and repenting another, if he rest his hope of pardon upon the lenity of his Creator, he should also remember that the Judge of the earth is a God of equity ; consequently, that he who renders himself unworthy of mercy, must abide the solemn decisions of avenging justice. How unable we are to meet the rigorous sentence of the latter, without meriting the qualifying grace of the former, I shall leave to the serious enquiries of your own consciences ; to a devout consideration of those transgressions which you have committed, and which, though unpunishable by human tribunals, because the laws of society cannot reach them, or screened from the detection of men by the arts of fraud and secrecy, must still be noticed by Him whose knowledge cannot

cannot be deceived, and punished by Him whose power cannot be controuled. That such conscientious meditations, daily repeated, may awaken in you a due sense of your past iniquities, and lead you to that lively repentance which can alone ensure salvation, may God, of his infinite mercy grant, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ !

SERMON

and is desired, and promised by Him
whose power cannot be controverted. That
such controversies mediations, duly re-
spected may awaken in you a true sense of
your past iniquity, and lead you to that
lively repentance which can alone ensure
forgiveness, may God of his infinite mercy
grant through the merits and mediation of
Jesus Christ.

AMEN

SERMON XV.

PSALM xlii. ver. 1 and 2.

*Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so
longeth my soul after thee, O God.*

*My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the
living God. When shall I come to appear
before the presence of God?*

THESE words have led me to consider the necessity and the advantages of paying public adoration to the Supreme Being. The particular circumstances have been mentioned which, in all probability, occasioned the poignant regret that disquieted the soul of David. I also observed,

T

that

that men are prompted, even by the impulse of natural reason to worship God; that no people, however savage and ferocious in their manners, have existed upon earth without religious ceremonies; and that all nations believed in some presiding Deity, to whom the tribute of veneration was due. In addition to this, it was shewn, that the truth of these common and natural notions was confirmed by God himself, in his ordinances to his chosen people the Jews. Lastly, That the duty of public worship was imposed upon all Christians by the precepts of our Saviour himself, and consecrated by his own example, and that of his apostles.

Such is the authority, and such the reasons, that exact obedience in this particular. And as we cannot suppose that the Father of the universe, ever anxious for the welfare of all his children, would have been so express in his injunctions on this head, unless the benefits of our compliance were proportionably important, it becomes an useful and a necessary task to consider what these
advan-

advantages are, since a conviction that it is our interest to discharge this duty with zeal and fidelity, must, of course, have great influence upon our conduct, and operate forcibly as a supplemental sanction to the divine law.

Touching this point, I endeavoured to prove how intimately the vital principles of religion are connected with the outward profession of them.—The wickedness of mankind does not arise in general from ignorance of their duty, but from want of proper reflection. Man may, it is true, by the long habitual practice of any vice, deaden all the compunctions of conscience, and feel little or no remorse for their uniform perseverance in immorality; yet few, I believe, ever entered into the paths of iniquity without feeling some disquietude, some emotions of horror, at the commencement of their iniquitous course. And it can hardly be supposed, from the very nature of evil habits, that such sinners will be reclaimed, till they are thoroughly persuaded

of the wretchedness of their condition, and brought to a just sense of their perilous state.

Were the public worship of God wholly interdicted, there is much danger lest the heart should be gradually detached from the obligations of piety, and, assailed on every side by the allurements of temporal interest and pleasure, sink at last into the gross lethargy of voluptuousness and sensuality. That these are repeatedly the fatal consequences of similar neglect, we know from the miserable lessons of daily experience. God forbid then, that we should be so improvident, so insensible to our real good, as to reject, or even treat with levity and indifference, an institution, by which such heavy evils may be happily obviated!

Another signal advantage that results from the stated celebration of divine worship, and one eminently conducive to the general welfare of society, is, that by these means, genuine sentiments of humility may be excited

cited, and the true spirit of Christian charity diffused and invigorated. Unless, indeed, we assemble here without any firm conviction of our duty, merely in formal compliance with the prescriptions of custom, or from motives of ostentation and temporal interest; or for the indolent purpose of consuming time that we are otherwise unable to fill up, such will be the happy consequences of it.

For if we are actuated by the impulse of unfeigned piety, what must our reflections be in this place!—Though we cannot contemplate the Deity but as a Being whose eye pervades every part of heaven and earth, yet he is, in a more strict and awful sense, supposed to be present in those places that are set apart for and consecrated to his peculiar service; where all the objects of worldly ambition, all the gratifications of sensual pleasure ought to be renounced; where every business is solemnly excluded, save that which tends to the confirmation of his honour and glory, by enforcing the

claims of his holy religion. We are, therefore, to consider ourselves as appealing here to the immediate inspection of God, because we here openly make professions of homage and submission to him ; because we implore his favour and protection by a declaration of our trust in his power and goodness, and by acknowledging our zeal and readiness to do those things which he hath commanded. Is it possible then, that any one who seriously reflects upon the sacred obligations to which he binds himself by public worship, can imagine them to be such that he may the next moment abjure their authority ! that he may, after he has left this place, where his prayers were offered up, and the services of fidelity and attachment tendered, reap the blessed fruits of the former, without any practical confirmation of the latter ! If we do entertain such a supposition, what must our ideas be of the Supreme Being ? Surely, not that he is a God of purity and justice, a Lover of righteousness, and the Hater of iniquity ; but that he is like those weak, proud, and conceited mortals, whose vanity is gratified
by

by the verbal effusions of flattery, and the external offerings of interested servility. Before we can suppose this, however, we must relinquish the belief of all that we have professed to believe in the temple of God; we must admit such ideas of the Deity, that we could no longer confide in the equity or the mercy of his decisions; consequently, the efficacy of our prayers would be doubtful, our attempts to conciliate his favour precarious in their operation, and every motive that contributes to advance and establish the cause of virtue, would lose its main support. But as the principles of action among Christians rest upon the foundations of truth that can never be subverted, and their hopes of rewards are built on the promises of Him who cannot deceive, their deviations from the fidelity which they had vowed, cannot be imputed to any mistrust in the power or goodness of God. They swerve from the path of obedience, because their thoughts are, for a time, alienated from their Maker by the pleasing temptations of sin, and drawn off

from the contemplation of future evil by the direct proffer of present good. It is necessary, therefore, that we should often be reminded of the deceitfulness of sinful enjoyments, and frequently called to a just sense of our duty to God, by being solemnly admonished of the fatal consequences that will finally attend the violation of it.

Whenever we assemble here, let us consider in whose presence we stand, whose assistance we invoke by protestations of zeal and holiness. All earthly distinctions which wealth or rank produce, ought to be forgotten when we prostrate ourselves before the common Father of mankind. Whatever superiority we may arrogate to ourselves above others in the outward circumstance of life, this is not the place for the ostentatious display of it. Exalted as any of us may seem, when compared with our indigent and destitute brethren, the difference is infinitely greater between the most dignified, the most elevated of mortals, and

and the Supreme Being. In his sight we are all equally weak and imperfect; and no distinction will weigh with him, except what is made by virtue and integrity. We may, indeed, abound in temporal blessings, and possess every thing that constitutes either the pride or pleasure of life; yet, as all our possessions are derived from God, who is the sole Fountain of honour and wealth, so the tenure of them depends upon his mercy;—nor can we offer up our prayers and supplications to the throne of grace without acknowledging this. At the same time also, by the profession of Christianity, we not only declare ourselves bound to honour God, but to love our neighbour as ourselves. Nay, so strongly is the latter duty enjoined us by our Saviour himself, that our very salvation is suspended on the faithful performance of it.

Shall we then, after having declared our belief in these terms of acceptance, and our assent to be finally judged by them, act in avowed

avowed opposition to their authority ? Shall we, when we return to our several employments in society, forget the obligations to which we have vowed inviolable adherence ? Shall we cruelly trample upon those who resist our power, and unfeelingly turn aside from the distresses which we are able to alleviate ? — If we do, we are no longer worthy of the name of Christians. And let us be ever so uniform in our acts of devotion, we may rest assured that our prayers will become an abomination in the sight of God, and that our very professions of zeal and sanctity will aggravate the measure of our future punishment.

Let me then admonish those who have hitherto frequented the house of the Lord, without demonstrating their piety by love and charity to their brethren ; let me admonish them to extricate themselves from the snarls of sin, to reflect seriously upon the miserable issues of such deliberate insult towards the majesty of God, and, while there is yet time, to work out their salvation by bring-

bringing forth the fruits of unfeigned repentance! Divine mercy hath this day permitted you to join in the public worship of your Creator. Such adoration is undoubtedly one of the means of grace, and will operate effectually in securing your eternal happiness, if the words which you hear with your outward ears be grafted inwardly in your hearts, and bring forth the fruit of good living. But be not deceived by the supposition, that the treasures of immortality are to be obtained by the superficial shew of holiness, or that God can be imposed upon by empty professions of homage and veneration. "Not every one that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven; but he only that doeth the will of our Father who is in Heaven."

The last benefit that I shall mention as flowing from public worship, is its tendency to calm and fortify the mind in seasons of distress and affliction. When we are bowed

bowed down by the pressure of adversity, which we are conscious cannot be ascribed to our own immoral conduct, while at the same time we behold men, avowedly profligate and impious, successful in all their enterprizes, and enjoying in security what they have acquired by violence and dishonesty, we are apt, from this apparently inequitable distribution of good and evil, to murmur at the dispensations of Providence, and complain of the unmerited severity of our own lot.

David himself experienced the anguish of similar disquietude. “ Lo, these are the
 “ ungodly, these prosper in the world, and
 “ these have riches in possession : and I said,
 “ then have I cleansed my heart in vain,
 “ and washed mine hands in innocency.
 “ Then thought I to understand this, but it
 “ was too hard for me, until I went into
 “ the sanctuary of God : then understood
 “ I the end of these men.” That which was
 the remedy for his anguish, may also be
 ours ; that which solved all his doubts, and
 ministered

ministered tranquillity to his disquieted soul, will work the same blessed effect in us, if we contemplate the subject with the same holy temper of mind.

When we estimate the condition of the wicked in prosperity, and that of the righteous in distress, by the standard of worldly good and evil alone, we are led to pronounce the one happy, the other miserable. But if we extend the comparison no further, our decision is incomplete, because we omit the most material points in the case. This difference in their respective lots, however great it now appears from outward circumstances, can exist only for a very short and a very precarious period, since it is limited to the duration of their present lives. Did a man voluntarily enter into **scenes** of toil, labour, and difficulty, from a **conviction** that perseverance must be finally **crowned** by adequate honour and wealth, he would hardly look upon himself as truly miserable, or sink into despondency when his zealous efforts were encountered

by

by formidable opposition. The hope of obtaining the glorious reward would animate his exertions, and the difficulties that attended the removal of any obstacle, would be amply compensated by the consciousness that he was thus brought nearer to the acquisition of the prize. This is exactly the situation of a righteous man oppressed by temporal misfortunes, and struggling against the power of temptation. The object of his hope is everlasting glory in another life; and the occasional disasters that he meets with here are counterbalanced by the prospect of incorruptible bliss hereafter.

Without admitting a state of future retribution, it will be impossible, by any arguments, to reconcile the justice of God with his visible dispensations. By it every difficulty may be removed; for, in a state of trial, it is necessary that some time be allowed for a proof of those virtues that can entitle us to rewards: and as men are free agents, it must inevitably happen, that many will deviate from the laws of honesty, and sacrifice every

every claim of justice and charity to private interest. The wicked, therefore, will frequently obtain the honours and riches of this world, because they are restrained by no ties of equity; and considering those as the only objects that merit their attention, they exert all their faculties, both of body and mind, to procure them. These triumphs of the ungodly will consequently involve in them the degradation of the virtuous, the oppression of the innocent; in short, the distress and ruin of those that refuse to be their associates, and scorn to attain elevation and opulence by the same iniquitous means. Nor is it to be wondered, if they who groan under the scourge of wanton cruelty; if the righteous, who feel "the despitefulness of the proud, and the scornful reproof of the wealthy," pour forth their complaints when they thus drink the bitter dregs of human misery. But let them enter into the sanctuary of the Lord, let them hear the gracious promises of the living God! they will then, as David did, acquiesce in the measures of his providence. No greater evils befall

befall them than what have, at all times, been the portion of just and holy men. Even the life of the Saviour of the world was a state of poverty and humiliation; and it was terminated by an ignominious death, amidst the insulting taunts of his virulent persecutors. His apostles also endured the utmost torments that malice could suggest, or revengeful power inflict; and "they of whom the world was not worthy, wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins."

These are the lessons of resignation which we are taught in the temple of God. Philosophy, indeed, may inculcate principles of fortitude; it may stimulate us to bear the evils of life with courage, by shewing that impatience and complaint, instead of alleviating the burthen, degrade the dignity of human nature. Nevertheless, the heroism that it inspires, whatever merit it claims from its inflexible firmness, is not to be compared with the calm submission of the Christian sufferer. The eloquent exhortations

hortations of philosophy rather awe us to silence than sooth us to quiet; they do not abate the sense of our calamity, though they may sometimes make us ashamed to complain. By Christian resignation, the sharp edge of adversity is not only taken off, but the faithful servant of his Lord receives all his troubles with complacency, because he knows that they will enhance his reward hereafter; he rejoices that he is counted worthy to suffer for righteousness sake, because he is assured that they who have been joined with Christ in distress and affliction in this world, will, in the world to come, be joined with him in everlasting glory and happiness.

It is our interest then, as well as our duty, to acquire this happy frame of mind; and it can only be attained by a frequent contemplation of the attributes of God, and sincere zeal in the performance of his holy will. Temporal evils are, in some degree, the universal portion of all mortals; and

as nothing, except a sense of religion, can keep us steady and humble in the giddy heights of prosperity, so nothing, except a firm conviction of the future mercies of God, can preserve us from despair under the pressure of poverty and distress.

But if it be folly and weakness, according to the maxims of philosophy, to complain of that which can neither be repelled nor mitigated by the murmurs of complaint, Christians surely manifest little dependence upon God, and a very imperfect trust in the veracity of his declarations, when they question the equity of his arrangements, because they are involved in calamities which they think they do not deserve. The charms of prosperity and an easy access to the pleasures of the world, are snares by which many have been led to destruction. Can they be certain that their virtue would have stood unseduced by the same insidious allurements? In the earlier
part

part of our lives we are obliged, by the command of our earthly parents, to submit to discipline that appears harsh, unnecessary, and little better than an act of tyranny: yet how often do we afterwards acknowledge the utility of it, and bless the hand that, by the application of proper severity, renewed a right spirit within us, and averted those miseries which the blind fondness of parental indulgence would probably have brought upon us! Shall we think that the discipline to which our Heavenly Father subjects us, is less the result of wisdom! That his corrections are less conducive to our real welfare! This present state of our existence is but for a short term. It is only valuable as it may prepare us for the inheritance of that which will be eternal. He that placed us here, will fulfil the promises made on his part; and if we lose the reward which Infinite Goodness has reserved for us, it must be because we reject the means that Infinite Wisdom has prescribed for the attainment of it.

Besides,

Besides, what presumption is it in man to arraign any of the subordinate dispensations of Providence, when he can see but a very small portion of the system ! Did a person, from a partial and contracted view of a spacious building, take upon him to condemn the symmetry and disposition of the whole, we should pronounce his decision rash and ungrounded. Much more intemperate and inconclusive is his judgment, who presumes by the narrow line of human understanding, to fathom the unsearchable depths of Divine Wisdom ! He whose power is almighty, can make all things work together for the consummation of his everlasting purposes ; and, as in the natural world, the violent concussions of the elements frequently produce serenity, so in the moral, those tumults that indicate a suspension of order and regularity ; those temporary triumphs of iniquity that seem at the time to argue the absence of controuling justice, often subside in the establishment of peace and harmony. And the day will finally come, when all apparent irregularities

irregularities shall be fully vindicated, and the clouds that now hang over the system shall be dispersed; when the captious murmurs of man shall be silenced by the awful decisions of unerring equity, and God shall be acknowledged to have been just and holy in all his ways.

To Him therefore, in the wisdom of whose present arrangements we ought to acquiesce, from religious confidence in the future dispensations of his mercy and goodness, be ascribed, as is most justly due, all honour, power, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore.

intermediates that go by undisturbed and
the clouds that may pass over the system
shall be supposed: when the vapours are
more or less that be allowed for the solid
portions of matter, and we shall
be enabled to see how far they
in all be

To this question of the window of
whose picture we are now to apply to
physics, from which we shall see in the
next section of the next part of
this book, we shall see that all
the things which we are now to
consider are of the same kind.

SECTION

SERMON XVI.

PSALM xlii. ver. 1 and 2.

*Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so
longeth my soul after thee, O God.*

*My soul is a thirst for God, yea, even for the
living God. When shall I come to appear be-
fore the presence of God?*

WHATEVER were the unhappy cir-
cumstances that excited these fer-
vent expressions; whether David had at
this time fled from the persecution of Saul,
or whether it was that he had been driven
from his kingdom by the revolt of his son

Abſalom; whatever may have been the particular cauſe of his diſtreſs, the object of his anguiſh is evident; he regrets that he is no longer able to teſtify his piety in the temple of the Lord, and join with the faithful in the public worſhip of the God of Iſrael. “ When I think thereupon,” he ſays, “ I pour out my heart by myſelf: for
 “ I went with the multitude, and brought
 “ them forth into the houſe of God; in the
 “ voice of praiſe and thankſgiving among
 “ ſuch as keep holy-day.”

Of ſuch high importance then did public devotion appear in the eyes of David, that, amidſt all the other miſeries under which he laboured, he mentions no one of them; — his ſoul is diſquieted within him, not becauſe he is diveſted of ſecular honours and dignities, or compelled to wander from place to place a forlorn and perſecuted fugitive, but becauſe he is excluded from the temple of his God, and no longer able to offer up the tribute of praiſe and thankſgiving

giving in the congregation of the righteous.

It is manifest, from the uniform attestation of the annals of mankind, that men are by nature strongly drawn towards religious principles; even the most barbarous and most uncultivated nations have ever had stated modes of worship, and always thought it necessary to conciliate the protection of that Being whom they contemplated as the Supreme Disposer of all things, by public adoration. Their religious ceremonies, it is true, may appear to us who are refined by civilization, and illuminated by the clear rays of heavenly truth, to be a mass of fanciful or superstitious absurdities; yet they do at the same time forcibly establish the natural tendency of man towards devotion: nor is this to be wondered at, when we consider the inherent qualities of our frame and constitution; every thing we behold in the various departments of the visible creation, leads us to acknowledge the agency of Almighty Power, and the intelligence

telligence of Infinite Wisdom ; and if we believe the existence of a superintending Being, to whose controul all things are subjected, we must of course be induced to adopt those measures that seem likely to ensure his favour. Did we know of any person in the community to which we belong, whose patronage could secure to us every temporal good, and whose enmity must as infallibly involve us in poverty and distress, it would be consummate folly to neglect those things that might conciliate the one and avert the other. How much greater then is the folly of those who, although they believe in their hearts that there is a God, omit every thing that can impart to them the light of his countenance, and uniformly practise that which must inevitably draw down upon their heads the terrors of his wrath and indignation ! Magnify the importance of the objects to be acquired by the friendship and assistance of man as much as you please, extend the duration of their good to the utmost limits of probability,—what are they
when

when compared with the exalted blessings which the Deity can, and has promised to confer upon his faithful servants ! Singularly propitious must fortune be to your wishes, if circumspection can always protect your temporal possessions against the blasts of casualty, or your power always shield them against the arm of violence and oppression.

Yet, even if you should escape the common accidents of life, should the attacks of adversity assail you so lightly, that the foundations of your happiness still remain unimpaired, there is one enemy to your present bliss whom you cannot elude ; to whose summons you know, beyond all doubt, that you must one day submit. The ear of death cannot be soothed by the incense of flattery, or the proffer of riches ; neither can its dart be repelled by the strength of the most powerful monarch upon earth. But “ when the body shall return to dust, then shall the spirit return to Him that gave it.” And how will
that

that soul appear in the presence of its Judge, that is stained with iniquity, and polluted by unrepented crimes! How will he appear at the tribunal of his God, whose whole life was passed in ungrateful forgetfulness of his abundant mercies, and in obdurate defiance of his wrath and indignation! — If the treasures reserved for the righteous by Infinite Goodness, are such as should animate us to encounter all difficulties with zeal and alacrity for the acquisition of them, the punishment hereafter to be denounced against the wicked by infinite power will, we may rest assured, be such, that no present enjoyments can be the least compensation for what we shall finally suffer.

These are the principal arguments by which the expediency of religious adoration hath been communicated to mankind, even from the deductions of natural reason; and the very same motives that induced men in their individual capacity to pay private homage to the Supreme Being; namely,

namely, the obligation of the returns of gratitude for benefits received ; a consciousness of weakness and dependence, on one side ; of all power and authority, on the other : these also were motives that impelled men, when united together in the bonds of social confederacy, to adopt forms of public worship, to assemble at stated times in consecrated places, to return thanks for what they had already enjoyed ; to implore a continuance of the same divine protection ; and, in the seasons of peril and distress, to solicit the saving health of that Power who could alone deliver them from the evils by which they were actually oppressed, and avert those by which they were menaced.

But if the necessity of public worship was thus discovered by the inquiries of natural reason, the duty of it presses much more forcibly upon us who are excited to it by the express command of divine revelation.

It

It pleased the Almighty, in the earlier ages of the world, to select one nation from the rest of mankind, and to honour them with the title of his Peculiar People: they were the guardians of his holy oracles, and preserved the knowledge of the one true God, when the other regions of the earth were overwhelmed in the gross darkness of Pagan superstition. The instances are so numerous in the Jewish annals, in which the people were commanded by Heaven to pay public homage to their Creator, that there is no need to advert to particular passages in proof of it. And when the Jewish dispensation was superseded by that of the gospel, of which it had been the forerunner, the obligation to public worship still continued in force. Our Saviour enjoined his followers to pay adoration to God, not only in their private prayers, but in public assemblies; and he himself set the example, by frequently appearing in the synagogue during the time of divine service. His apostles also were actively employed in forming religious congregations; and laboured diligently

diligently in prescribing rules for the proper government of them.

Yet, in defiance of these arguments, which one would imagine must appear fully satisfactory to Christians, there are numbers that seem by their conduct to disbelieve their validity. Some look upon public worship as a mere political engine, made use of by legislators for the sole purpose of promoting harmony and peace in society, without having any reference to the more important point of eternal salvation. Yet, even viewing it in this light, it must be pleasing to the Beneficent Father of mankind, since it promotes those ends which cannot but coincide with the measures of Divine Goodness. They, therefore, who allow it to have this effect, are blind to their own interest, and may be stigmatized as fools if they refuse to enforce it by their own example.

Others are averse to complying with the institutions of public worship, because they
fancy

fancy that they who do, act not from the pure principle of piety, but are influenced alone by the spirit of ostentation, or wish to appear sincere and fervent in religion, that they may the better advance their interest in temporal concerns. By the same mode of reasoning they may absolve themselves from the open performance of every duty : it is not the province of man to decide who are hypocrites or not :—that must be left to the inspection of wisdom infinitely superior to ours. But He, who was the only person upon earth that ever had an unquestionable right to arraign hypocrisy, hath commanded us to “ let our light so “ shine before men, that they may see our “ good works, and glorify our Father who “ is in Heaven.” If we are conscious of the purity of our intentions, and the rectitude of our hearts, we have little reason to dread the unfounded imputations of the world ; we order our actions by an unalterable standard of right and wrong : we rest secure ; for we rest upon that judgment which cannot be warped from equity by prejudice,

prejudice, nor perverted by the subtle misrepresentations of fraud and artifice. Let us also remember, that in openly performing our duty to God, we naturally excite others to the same work, and extend the influence of religion as far as our example can operate; nor shall we lose the reward of our pious labours, for "they that turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars, for ever and ever."

God knows the prevalence of religious principles is not so strong or universal, that any of those supports by which it is maintained, can be safely dispensed with; and if the true servant of his Lord has every day reason to lament the depravity and wickedness of the human race, he would, in all probability, have much more cause for his sorrow, should all public worship of God be interdicted. The world abounds with temptation; and so forcibly do the allurements of present ease and immediate pleasure impress themselves upon the mind, that we frequently see men abandon them-

selves to certain and lasting misery for the trivial enjoyment of a momentary gratification. Nothing can enable us to stand unshaken in the complicated trials to which we are exposed, except a steady constant regard to the obligations of virtue and piety. He that relaxes his vigilance, though but for a short interval, lays himself open to an enemy that is ever intent upon his spiritual destruction; and the powers of resistance become weak and languid on one side, in proportion as the approaches are made with success on the other.

The great utility of assembling together in honour of our Creator, consists in this. Public worship calls us periodically to a consideration of our dependence upon God; it solemnly lays before us a detail of those duties, by the sincere observance of which we may secure to ourselves his favour and protection, and it animates us to the performance of them by no less a reward than that of everlasting glory and happiness.

Cold must his heart be, who can hear the wonders that the Lord hath wrought for the children of men displayed, without some emotions of gratitude; and obdurately insensible must he be, who can hear the terrors of his wrath and vengeance enumerated without some alarm, lest he himself may finally experience them.

Now, should the public adoration of our Creator be wholly omitted, all those occasional incentives to piety and repentance would be lost; all those means would be cut off by which men might thus enter into the paths of mercy; and that voice (by which sinners might be wounded with a just sense of their crimes, and dread the punishment entailed upon them) that warning voice, would no longer be heard.

They would still have, it is true, the light of natural reason for their guide; and they might, by a diligent perusal of the sacred writings in the calm seasons of retirement, confirm their hearts in the belief of God,

and in the knowledge of the claims of religion ; — yet, amidst the manifold distractions of the world, in the confused scenes of active life, where the province of earthly good is so extensive, and the temptations to sin so numerous and so attractive ; where many of our hours must be consumed in devising plans, and many in the subsequent execution of them ; where defeat frequently obliges us to make new arrangements, and success as often induces us to pursue our operations in a wider field of action ; in this complicated, this tumultuous eddy of incessant toil, care, and anxiety, the moments I am afraid will be few that are seriously dedicated to the purposes of pious meditation. There is much danger, lest the awful concerns of futurity should at last be totally absorbed in the eager prosecution of pleasure or wealth, and the mind, no longer meeting with any salutary check from without, devote itself wholly to the pursuit of present good. We may fairly conclude that it would have this miserable effect, because, among the number of those
unhappy

unhappy persons who have fallen victims to the injured laws of their country, many have ascribed their ruin to this cause :—They have declared in their last moments, that their entrance into the paths of dishonesty commenced with the desertion of the public worship of God, and that they were easily carried through the several stages of iniquity when the avenues to religious knowledge were thus stopped up, and their consciences no longer awed by a sense of the fatal issues of sin.

Such are some of the salutary consequences of public worship ;—yet there are others of high importance, which the time will not permit me to mention at present. Were these the only beneficial fruits of it, it would be prudent and wise to support it with all our ability.

Had God given us no commands in this matter, we should be led to this demonstration of our gratitude and homage, from a persuasion that such a sacrifice must be ac-

ceptable to the Supreme Being, and that what was pleasing in his sight, could not fail to be rewarded by his favour and protection : — but we are not left to probable conjectures on this essential point, God hath by his express word constituted the public adoration of him an indispensable duty. — In the first place therefore, by refusing this testimonial of our faith, we act contrary to the dictates of natural reason ; in the second, we insolently violate a positive command of our Almighty Creator,

Need I adduce any other arguments to prove the necessity of public worship ? Is it possible that they who are not convinced by these, can be convinced by any other proofs ?

Let us then remember, that as the injunction is solemnly delivered by the Lord himself, the violation of it will not be passed over with impunity. Of this we may rest assured ; for God cannot, without a breach

breach of his holy promise, honour those who refuse to honour him.

We ought also to remember, that the whole of this duty is not comprized in mere ceremonial attendance at stated times. Homage that consists solely in the devout expressions of the lips, is not that which the majesty and goodness of God claims, or what will be accepted by him. Our prayers, our acts of devotion in this place, are then only valuable and efficacious when the faith of them is testified by a life of virtue and holiness. Without this substantial confirmation of their sincerity, they are an insult and an abomination to the God of purity and truth.

Therefore, when we retire from hence, let the zeal which we have here openly avowed in the service of our Maker, manifest its reality in our intercourse with our brethren! Let the piety which we have here externally shewn in our united addresses to the throne of grace, go forth with

us into the walks of social life; let it be the fixed immutable standard by which the claims of every relative duty are adjusted. And God grant that it may shed its hallowed influence upon all our thoughts and actions!

Thus shall we make our calling and election sure; for by these means, and these only, will the words of our mouth and the meditations of our heart, be found acceptable in the presence of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

SERMON

SERMON XVII.

MATTHEW, chap, v. ver. 16.

*Let your light so shine before men, that they
may see your good works, and glorify your
Father who is in Heaven.*

VARIOUS are the ways in which the genuine principles of the Christian religion have been perverted, and its features so distorted, that few vestiges have been left to indicate their original grace and beauty. The passive credulity and imaginary fears of superstition have frequently harraressed the minds of weak, though well-disposed

disposed persons, with perpetual horror; they have converted that into a bitter source of disquietude and anguish, which was meant by the gracious Author of our being to be the spring from whence the living waters of peace, joy, and comfort should flow. Enthusiasm, on the contrary, has often raised others above all apprehensions of danger touching their final state. Animated by this spirit, men have supposed themselves immediately commissioned by the Almighty to vindicate his honour and glory, and in the execution of the charge thus ideally delegated to them, they have not hesitated to cancel the strongest ties of humanity; and, in order to promote the glory of God, have acted directly contrary to his express commands. In addition to all this, religion has been repeatedly employed as an engine of earthly policy; and, interested men have made no scruple to attach enthusiasm and superstition to their party, when they seemed to be fit agents for the promotion of their private designs.

Thus

Thus hath the word of God been perverted from its native purity. Though we shall find the stream clear and pure, if we go to the fountain-head, it is not wonderful that it should have been defiled and vitiated, in passing through the various channels into which the depraved passions of mankind have turned its course. In order, therefore, to correct these impurities, and prevent them from communicating the poison to our own souls, we ought diligently to peruse those scriptures which God has imparted, and walk by that steady light which he has vouchsafed to give us, not by the uncertain and fallacious meteors of fancy and imagination : the one will safely guide our steps in the paths of life ; the other, like those glimmering exhalations which allure benighted travellers to pits and precipices, will lead us into the broad way of destruction, and finally bring us to the gates of death,

Among the many delusions which men have embraced in the important article of salvation,

salvation, by substituting terms of acceptance different from those which God has been pleased to appoint through the mediation of Jesus Christ, there is no one error more fatal to the interests of society than that confidence which is placed in the external rites and ceremonies of religion. There have been men in every age like the Scribes and Pharisees of old, who supposed the essence of true piety to consist in outward forms of devotion, and imagined, or pretended to imagine, that a rigid and inflexible adherence to particular systems of faith, would conciliate the favour of Heaven, and admit them to the participation of everlasting happiness in the world to come.

But is it possible that we can examine the gospel of Christ, as delivered by himself, and enforced and explained by his apostles, without seeing the fallacy of such principles? Is it possible that we can call ourselves Christian Disciples, merely because we openly profess the Christian faith? As
well

well may a man affirm that he is a true lover of his country, because he talks loudly of the virtues of patriotism. Words, indeed, may impose upon the multitude, but they are no unequivocal test of sincerity; and the truly wise will require stronger evidence before they admit the reality of these boasted and clamorous pretensions.

The Scribes and Pharisees in the time of our Saviour, had acquired great influence among the people by apparent austerity; by a regular conformity to the strictest ordinances of the Mosaic law. Yet, whenever an opportunity offered, they were the constant objects of Christ's reprehension. So far was he from approving their ostentation in the performance of religious duties, that he recommended a line of conduct totally the reverse to his disciples. "When thou doest thine alms, let not the left hand know what thy right hand doeth. When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret; and thy

“ thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”

But it may be here asked, Do not these admonitions contradict others of the same divine authority? How is this recommendation of secrecy and retirement consistent with the charge in the text? “ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven.” These are our Saviour’s words. If then our alms are to be done with the greatest privacy, and our prayers addressed to our Creator in secret, how can they operate so as to induce others by our example to glorify God in the same manner?—In answer to this, we may observe that Christ does not interdict public prayer, or public benevolence. He means no more than to demonstrate the inefficacy of them when they proceed wholly from a desire to impose upon the world, as it did in those hypocrites whom he arraigns. “ Verily,” says he, “ they have their reward.” That is, the applause and honour

nour of men : — the only object to which they directed their attention. Neither ought we to conclude that our Saviour, when he reprehended the hypocritical observance of eternal-rites in the law of Moses, meant to persuade the Jews to renounce all regard to those institutions. They had been ordained and commanded by the God of Israel. Yet surely there could be little merit in the most rigid compliance with them, when they superseded the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. Where they did not clash with these important points, our Saviour himself was uniform in fulfilling them. So far was he from discountenancing the public duties of real devotion, or arraigning the open exertions of true charity and benevolence, that his own example displays the brightest pattern of excellence we can conceive in these particulars. We may illustrate this in one short but complete sentence : — “ He went about daily doing good.” And as we are bound by the very adoption of Christianity to imitate our divine Master, we must endeavour

deavour, to the utmost of our ability, to shew ourselves his disciples; not by professions, but by practice; not by the form, but by the power of godliness; not by ostentatious declarations of faith, but by bringing forth those fruits, without which genuine faith can no more exist than the body without the spirit.

It is indeed true, that good actions, performed in the face of the world, will ever be liable to misconstruction; because the judgment of those who assume the province of ascertaining their intrinsic merit, must ever be obnoxious to error. Many persons will be unable to comprehend the subject by a proper investigation of the several points necessary to produce a fair discussion; of course, their decision must be rash, and may, very probably, be given in direct opposition to the truth. Others, under the controul of envy or malice, pride or interest, will be swayed by the violence of these turbulent passions; not by the sober steady principles of reason and equity. They will
eagerly

eagerly strive to counteract whatever seems detrimental to their own advantage; they will endeavour to depreciate that virtue which they feel no inclination to imitate, and to lessen the credit of that benevolence of heart, which they have not either the power or the wish to exhibit in their own dealings with their brethren. And since they cannot deny facts openly performed, they have no other resource than to question the principle of action, and invalidate the apparent merit of these good works, by resolving them into the love of fame, and the vanity of acquiring popular applause. But ought these reasons to restrain our religious or charitable efforts? Shall we hesitate to give that public assurance of our faith which is required, because the ignorance, malice, pride, or envy of men may misconstrue our actions, and ascribe them to improper motives? Should the soldier, when called upon to exert himself openly in defence of his country, refuse to display his valour, would it exculpate him from the charge of disaffection, to allege that his inactivity resulted

resulted from the fear of appearing actuated by the spirit of ostentation? The discharge of his duty, and the wish to animate others by his example, ought to take place of every other consideration. Exactly in the same predicament stands every Christian. This life is a state of perpetual warfare against the allurements of sin. We are all, therefore, equally bound, as members of Christ's church militant upon earth, to order our conduct implicitly in reference to the will of God. His commands are delivered to us; and as we must finally stand or fall by our fidelity or disobedience, it is of little moment if men condemn us, while we are acquitted by our own conscience. The cavils, censures, and malevolent insinuations of the world have little effect upon him who walks stedfastly in the law of the Lord, and can, in the confidence of Christian hope, resign his cause into the hands of the great Author of his life and being.

But if it be our duty, in a religious sense, to let our light shine before men, our temporal

poral interest also very materially depends upon it. This is suggested to us in the words of our Saviour; for the reason why we are commanded to appear righteous in the sight of men is, "that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in Heaven:" that they may glorify him, not by verbal praises, or mere forms of devotion; but that they may, influenced by our bright examples, be converted to the true faith, and to the practice of true virtue; and thus increase the happiness of men, by extending the influence of God's holy religion.

When we consider ourselves simply in the light of social beings, without any reference to a future state, it is apparent that vice of every kind is an enemy to our real welfare; that it equally destroys the happiness of individuals, and the prosperity of kingdoms. The uniform evidence of history proves, that, as nations obtain superiority, and enlarge the bounds of empire by the frugality and temperance of their citi-

zens, their power, on the other hand, is easily overthrown by the admission of luxury and dissipation; and when once the people become thoroughly corrupt, the fabric of their greatness, like a building whose foundations are loosened, can make but a feeble resistance against a spirited attack. On this account Legislators have endeavoured, in every age, from motives even of earthly policy, to invigorate virtue by the proffer of temporal rewards, and to check the progress of vice by the terrors of temporal punishment.

Such then is the condition of the great collective bodies of mankind when they are moulded into political states; and upon this basis the very existence of their grandeur rests. If we descend into the more contracted walks of life, where men are to be considered as forming small associations, or as still further subdivided into private families, we shall there also perceive how much the peace and security of these subordinate assemblies depend upon public virtue.

tue.—We may form an idea of this, by considering what the internal state of any district is likely to be, where the principal and most opulent inhabitants are studious to exhibit in their own persons examples of virtue and religion. I do not assert that their efforts will be able wholly to exterminate vice, but they will undoubtedly tend to circumscribe the sphere of its baneful influence. And as men are naturally sedulous to conciliate the favour and approbation of their superiors, they will of course be fearful to engage in those practices which must inevitably draw upon them their enmity and opposition. Industry, therefore, will be diligently exerted, because there is every reason to suppose that it will be properly rewarded. Intemperance, and licentiousness will be repressed, because there is little probability that they will be passed over with impunity. Consequently, vice will be checked in its course, by losing its main support; the avowed confederacy of dissolute associates. And since the force

of habits long indulged, frequently predominates over the original bias of nature itself, that which at first was only virtue in appearance, may in the process become so in reality; and those outward forms of temperance and sobriety, which were extorted by the fear of shame, or the dread of punishment, may, when their beneficial effects are at last ascertained and sensibly felt, be converted, by the blessing of God, into settled fixed principles of morality.—Happy would it be for the world at large, if those persons who are distinguished above others by rank, or wealth, endeavoured to signalize this superiority in external circumstances by the superior lustre of their own example. Their light would then diffuse its salutary rays abroad; and men, seeing their good works, would be induced to “glorify our Father who is in Heaven,” by making their own exertions co-operate in the promotion of virtue and piety. Nor is such conduct less conducive to the peace and happiness of the rich and dignified themselves. If they are conscious of the claims

claims either of religion or humanity, how greatly must the enjoyments of their prosperity be enhanced, when they contemplate themselves as the agents of divine Providence, effectually employed in maintaining the cause of religion, in promoting the welfare, and alleviating the miseries of mankind! And if there be any gratification in the deference and respect that are paid to opulence and titles, how much must the pleasure be increased, by the reflection that this tribute of homage is merited! that it is the offering of those who reverence virtue, and the effusion of gratitude from them who wish to acknowledge the benefits which they have received!

These are the eminent advantages that flow from the virtuous examples of the rich and the great; and, as the same train of reasoning is applicable to all the departments that exist in society, there is no need to pursue the subject further on that head.

With

With regard to those whom Providence hath placed in the lower orders of life, let them not slumber in indolence and inactivity, from an idea that they can contribute nothing towards the same beneficial ends. Though they cannot render themselves conspicuous as the liberal benefactors of the community at large, still there are many ways in which they may promote the glory of God, by letting their light shine even in the small circle of their contracted connexions. Though they cannot be like the vast ocean, by the means of which whole nations are enriched, yet they may resemble the gentle stream that fertilizes the narrow district through which it winds its silent course. The truth of this is repeatedly manifested by the lamentable fate of those who fall victims to the violated laws of their country. Habituated from their early days to the scenes of profligacy and vice, they know not what virtue or religion is; and as they see nothing in their companions but an utter contempt of all ties, human and divine, it is no wonder that

that they should in the end exhibit instances of similar depravity ; but if such are the melancholy issues of vicious communication, it is fair to conclude that an early connexion with the virtuous would have produced effects totally the reverse. There is no one therefore so low as to be excluded from the possibility of doing good by his example ; and consequently, every one is bound to exert his endeavours. — Let us also remember, that we are not to be judged solely according to the number of talents we have received, but according to the use we make of them. The parable of our Saviour informs us, that he who had received two talents entered into the joy of his Lord as well as he who had received five ; but the slothful improvident servant to whom one talent had been intrusted, was cast into utter darkness, because even that little might have been usefully employed. The servants in this parable represent the whole race of man ; and the judgment of their Lord is the emblem of that of our Redeemer. Such will the sentence be at the last day ; for the decision

decision of infinite goodness, power, and knowledge combined together, cannot be other than that of perfect equity.

Let us then consider that the time is now in our hands which is allotted to us for the employment of the several talents committed to our trust ! It is not our province to murmur at the disparity of God's present dispensations : — there must ever be different conditions in life ; and till all men are equal in bodily strength and intellectual endowments, it is impossible that a system of perfect temporal equality should exist. Have we only one talent, we might indeed complain, were the same produce to be required from us as from those who receive five ; but we know Reason and Revelation both assure us, that our Judge will not expect to reap where he has not sown. Be our portion ever so inconsiderable, our ability to do good ever so contracted, still if our endeavours are diligently and fully exerted, we shall in the great day of account stand upon a level with the most exalted

alted workers of righteousness : — we shall
be received with these gracious words,

“ Well done, ye good and faithful servants!

“ ye have been faithful over a few things;

“ I will make you rulers over many things:

“ enter ye into the joy of your Lord !”

THE END.

(102)

shall be of no use to us — we shall
be removed with these persons words
"Will you be so good and kind as to
"to have been faithful over a few things
"I will make you a few more things
"and I will be the joy of your heart"

6 EE 67